

THE BLIND
WHO SEE

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.



THE BLIND WHO SEE

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BY
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CHAPTER I

SHADOWS lay vague in the room, the lamp was keyed low as Nona liked to have it. In the old-fashioned grate a coal fire, dozing, offered orange-colored warmth. The big, round clock on the faded green wall ticked.

Nona lay on the divan watching her husband, Sylvus, who stood, as he so often did, by the piano, fingering his violin. He stood tall, gentle and gaunt, his head immobile, the eyelids reposefully covering his blindness. He was listening apparently to the silence in a pose of peculiar concentration.

"It must be nearly time," he said at last. "What does the clock say, Nona?"

She stirred lazily on the divan.

"There's half an hour yet, dear. The Hall does n't even open until eight, you know, and we dined early."

"That's so. I must have missed the strike of the hour."

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His long, swift fingers passed sensitively over his violin. Sylvus's hands were never still. It was as if they had stolen from his body and centered in themselves all the exquisite life of his nerves. Nona watched them — they fascinated her.

Worden the sculptor had once said, "If Sylvus Leete's hands were cut off, his soul would wither." Worden seldom clothed his thoughts so neatly and Nona had retained the phrase. It recurred to her now, and she wondered how much her own soul spoke through her hands. The idea was quaint. She raised an arm, tapering finely at the wrist, and stretched it out to the circle of fire glow. The flesh tints seemed whiter than usual. She spread her fingers fan-wise and held them rigidly, until she felt their tips tingle.

"There's the soul speaking," she thought to herself, and moved slightly among the propping cushions of the divan.

Suddenly she laughed and sweeping from the divan, ran over to him and took the violin from his hands. "It is n't good for ties."

"Not too near the fire, Nona."

"And not too near the window," she mimicked, "and not on the edge of a chair where it might be sat upon. Poor fragile Amati! There, it's in its case beside the other one you don't care so much about. Is that all right?"

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Then she came close to him and stroked his straight, brown hair which swept back in fine, serious lines, leaving free his profile — a profile suggesting a sixteenth-century portrait.

“Yes, touch my hair that way,” he said, “I love you to. Do you know, I’ve been thinking all day how good life is. I’ve told you so before, Nona — but I shall always tell you that.”

She moved her hands intimately from his hair to his tie, with which she busied herself. “You ask very little,” she said, her head to one side as she measured the tie ends.

“Why, Nona, I ask a lot. I’m always asking. I’m so happy to-night. It’s you and the atmosphere around me. I feel it’s different, too, when the lamp’s lit and daylight gone.” He made a vivid gesture. “I’ve asked you about it so many times that I can *see* the room now. At first I could n’t imagine the purple of the long hangings by the door until you gave me violets to smell, and it reminded me of long ago as a child. I’m reminiscing again. You’ll be tired of hearing me say the same things.”

“No,” said Nona quickly, “no.”

“I wonder so often what I’d do if I’d never seen at all — even those few precious years. Do you think I ever really *saw* any one like you? It seems terrible to think I might have and not realized it.

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But I found you, blind as I am," he laughed softly. "Now you're my eyes. How well I remember the first time you brought me into this room and said, 'I planned it all for you to work in, Sylvus. It's so and so and so.' You described it beautifully. Then the canaries sang. I was delighted as a child, especially when you told me that you'd put them on a table in front of the long, purple curtain. I liked the sound of the colors together — purple of violets and yellow of the sun."

"I'm glad," said Nona. "What did you and Worden talk about this afternoon, dear?"

"We did n't talk very much — he read aloud to me."

"What did he read?" Her voice had grown absent-minded.

"Keats — the thing I love so."

"Ah happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And happy, melodist unwearied,
Forever piping songs, forever new."

"Is n't that exquisite? It's the ode to a Grecian urn, you know."

"Yes," she said and stared into the fire.

"One of my vases has a shape like it. It must be on the end of the shelf."

"Yes, I know the one, dear."

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"The shelf is pretty full now," he went on eagerly. "Do they look well at night in the lamp-light?"

"They 're shadows from here," she said.

"Worden was saying again to-day how well they looked. He says it's a fine collection. He suggested putting them in a cabinet. But I like to reach and touch them without opening a door."

"I'm afraid they're not safe," began Nona. For some time she had wished to tell Sylvus this same thing. "Richard's right. They're valuable, and in passing you might —"

"I should never break one," he said quickly. "I never knock anything over unless you change the place of the furniture. No, they are quite safe."

"Oh, all right," she agreed. "Don't muss your tie, will you, Sylvus? It's very smart now."

"My tie? I'd forgotten it. The program is especially good to-night — Beethoven sonatas."

"Is n't it a dose for an American public? I'm not sure they care for so much classics."

He drew himself up still straighter as he answered her,

"The public have bigger souls than they're given credit for. There's the responsibility of education."

She let him talk, remaining quiet in the shadow.

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In these high moods of worship, he appeared to her as a very disciple of genius.

"Beethoven's a giant," he continued. "Before his death, in his last agony, he wrote supremely of joy. Don't forget that his message must go on from generation to generation. The public grows great in listening. We should never offer them less than the voice of a Master."

His hands fell to his sides as if exhausted . . . only for a moment.

Then he felt rapidly over the piano, lifted the Amati from its case, sought and found his favorite bow. The bow hovered over the strings and he played.

Nona, held still, leaned against the piano, her head turned toward him. The music stole, dreamy and slow, out into the room—notes like blind gods wandering on beaches by the sea, listening to the surge of waves. Now Sylvus spoke while he played.

"Beethoven was deaf and I am blind. We make heavenly music together. I'm no longer Sylvus when I play. I'm a mirror held reverently before which the great ones pass and give a divine moment's reflection. But since I've loved you, Nona, the master songs are for you. When I play, I and my violin take inspiration and leap to love of you."

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His bow fell gently from the strings; he lowered his violin.

Nona's cheeks flamed, she raised her shoulders in a tense gesture of emotion. Sylvus's genius led her to peaks of imagination, drew from her an answering joy of melody. There was pride in recognizing sublimity, and willing, she swayed in the direction of the spiritual feeling, aroused to a rare power of vibration, as if by a message from her impressionable soul to the magnetism of this musical purity.

"Oh, Sylvus, your playing always makes me want to be so *good*," she cried. "How can you stay quiet and calm after playing like that?"

He smiled. "To me the beauty of giving is very quiet, my darling."

She shook her head doubtfully. "Do you really think that? To me great quiet suggests profound sadness."

"Nothing should be sad," said Sylvus, gently. "Nothing beautiful should hurt — any more than you, beautiful as you are, could hurt. It's natural to be beautiful, you know, Nona."

"Is it?" she said. "I'm not sure. I might be able to hurt. Then I would be less beautiful?"

She was thinking that he did not know ugliness.

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Her voice trailed away slowly, her shoulders lowered. Reaction came — relaxation into a fatigue when she no longer wished for heights. Then she tossed her head back suddenly and walked the length of the room to the fire, as one who seeks above all, warmth, and a familiar sense of loneliness stole into her mood.

Gestures more than words had always outlined her personality. It was when she forgot that Sylvus could not see, when by an impulsive movement of head or hand, she strove to convey a shade of meaning to him, that realizing it was lost, she felt most inarticulate. She had often tried to translate gesture into expression, but this always forced exaggerated phrase. On the other hand she had often been startled by his intuitiveness, when she had given up hope of explaining some fragile thought. At times, however, like to-night, when he drove her to such vividness of nerves, leaving her alone in the inevitable consequences of reaction, she felt like a string upon which too fine music has been played — slightly frayed at the edges.

As she stared into the fire, she wondered how he could live in the constant ecstasy of inspiration. It seemed to her, now that the actual expression of his nature was over for the moment, as if its pressure were always there, as if the very room still hummed. Deep down in the eyes of the fire, she saw forces

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unknown to him — turbulence, restless impatience, an army of human passions. The sensitive prism of her mood almost pitied his vision without shadow. He walked so trustingly down paths he had never seen, with only his faith for guide. Once she had closed her eyes a long time — at least it had seemed a long time — to try and imagine his blindness. She had never forgotten the panic in a dark which was not blackness but space swimming with unanalyzed colors. She had wanted to walk forward, stumbled, bruised her arm, and with sudden, uncontrolled fear, twitched open her eyelids to stare and stare at familiar shapes.

It was strange how these memories recurred. She studied them and dreamed, posing gracefully in the firelight.

Behind her, Sylvus, content with his gift of sensitive immobility, still stood, fused in shadows.

The clock struck the hour. Sylvus listened and counted.

“Nona, it’s time,” he said.

“Yes, it’s time.” It was as if she had rested while dreaming her own separate dreams. The sense of fatigue had slipped from her.

She came slowly towards him. “I’ll ring for Antonin.”

“Who will be in your box, dear? You won’t be alone, will you?”

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She laughed. "Never alone, my dear. Laura Dunn is coming, of course, and Worden; I wanted Mr. Dietrich, because he has n't heard you yet and I thought Worden ought to meet him. But he's dining and going to the opera. He's always taken days ahead." She rang again. "Why does n't Antonin answer?"

"It was good of you to think of Worden," said Sylvus. "He needs the interest of men like Mr. Dietrich. He told me to-day that he was trying to get some of the newspapers to write up the question of the Art College."

"Poor Richard," her voice dismissed him. "What a glorious dreamer!"

"If there were more like him his dreams might become realities."

"Who knows!" Her attention wandered. She walked restlessly to the door.

A discreet knock announced Antonin, who peered short-sightedly into the room. Antonin's shoulders struggled between the military habit of an old soldier and the tendency of advancing years. Usually he wore white gloves, an idea of Nona's, who objected to his hands. He hated these gloves. To-night they were missing. Nona noticed this at once.

"Where are your gloves, Antonin?" she asked sternly.

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"Oh, my little Madame, they are soiled. They no longer serve," he replied glibly, standing still in the doorway in as soldierly a precision of attitude as his poor old back would permit.

She stared at him fixedly. "Where are your gloves?" she repeated.

Grumbling he dove into his pocket and produced a pair of limp, white things which hung dejected and crumpled. "Madame sees for herself," he said triumphantly. "And there is also a hole in the finger of one."

"You are to buy others to-morrow. And understand, Antonin, that you must *always* wear your gloves in my presence — *always*. Now bring Monsieur's coat and hat."

"The coat of fur, Madame means?"

"No, Antonin, you know I don't like the fur coat," said Nona impatiently. Antonin was very annoying. He took privileges of his long service in her family.

"Monsieur will catch his death," he grumbled and went out shaking his head. He adored Sylvus.

"Fetch a carriage too!" she called after him.

"Poor, honest, old man," said Sylvus.

"He's completely spoiled," she declared. "If he were n't so indispensable to you, Sylvus, I'd send him back to his country."

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A few moments later Antonin came forward, slowly, like a crab, carrying a fur coat.

"Monsieur cannot wear the other," he explained defiantly. "There is a button which misses. I shall sew it on to-morrow."

Sylvus chuckled. "*Allons*," he said in his careful French. "*Allons*, then, the fur coat, old rascal."

"You are stupid," scolded Nona. "The button should have been on."

"The little Madame knows that I have no time," he answered untroubled. "There is the canary cage to clean, the vases to dust, Monsieur to dress, rooms to do and meals to prepare. Sometimes I feel that I am growing very old to work so hard."

He gave Sylvus a wide-brimmed hat, deftly slipped on the coat, lifted the big, double violin case from the piano and stood waiting. Sylvus walked alone to the door. Then Nona took his arm. She was accustomed to these rides through the brilliant night city, and now leaned eagerly forward, close to the window, brushing away the autumn breath on the pane with her handkerchief. She liked the rumble and clatter of the carriage, the hollow reverberation of asphalt, the house fronts, blinds mysteriously down, behind which shone vague lights; she liked the spike-tipped glare of white lamps, hanging huge, distended, in drops

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of dazzle among disturbed shadows; the giant advertisements framed incandescently, the blaze at the doors of theaters, the volume of blurred night light; divided figures of men and women, whispering, staring, laughing, whirled on in the intoxication of promising hours; the warmth of the crowds who rubbed against one another in swift or slow passing — the entire panorama of human beings going their secret ways together and apart. All wide-flung doors of public places were adventurous invitations to her. She was curiously impressed, wistful of possibilities.

Sylvus was wrapped in a serene intimacy of dreams, beyond even the perception of ordinary sounds and scents.

And the air was troubled by the complexity of these two shut in the closed carriage. She was content to leave him silent, in his inspired absorption. It heightened the moment to know that from the stillness of his pose, he played and replayed the notes which would soon be released by his fingers.

But as they came near to the Hall, pressing close to him, her warmth electric, vivifying, she seized his arm.

“Sylvus, what a night,” she whispered.

The cold glow of the dark, autumnal sky pressed down on the streets, the sharp points of the stars, the knife edge in the air, cut. Her own perfume

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subtly stirred the dull gold of her coat and stole clinging around her, around Sylvus.

“What a night!” Suddenly she released his arm and sat straight in her corner, her head thrown back, breathing and breathing the air.

CHAPTER II

AS she guided him to the artist's lobby, she felt the whole tide of his thoughts turned from her to the approaching hour. Once or twice she glanced at him. His profile dreamed, he walked mechanically.

But at the moment when she took leave of him, he whispered, "I shall know, my dearest, where you are."

She had never grown accustomed to this curious psychic faculty of his—an unerring sensitiveness to her presence, a fine thread between them, which turned him in her direction, no matter how big or how crowded the room. It was as if she could not hide from him. The strange, magnetic current, seeking her out, flowed straight, producing often in her mind a doubt as to his blindness.

"You'll have a hard time to-night in this big Hall," she said gaily. "Our box has been changed, you know."

"I shall find you."

"We'll see," she said, and left him.

At the door, she met the pianist, Alexander

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Petroff, who was to play the sonatas with Sylvus. He was a man whom she disliked, and she tried to pass him by, with merely an inclination of her head and a rather faint smile. But he accepted no disdain, delaying her with a greeting which refused postponement.

Alexander Petroff was short and stout, with tiny feet and hands. Nona objected above all to his hair, which stuck together in shiny locks. His eyes were unexpected in the livid expanse of his face — they were dark, sleek and sad, with an unpleasant stare. They strove to convey by a changeless expression, the fatality of genius. Nona often wondered what lay behind them, picturing to herself a structure of egoism, high, enormous, complacent. She was forced, however, to give him attention as a musician, for there at least, he was sincere. The tiny hands were masterful. He played beyond and above his own small soul. Now as he bent over her hand, his voice was adjusted and persuasive — he used the language not his own, with careful precision. His eyes gathered her in their impassive melancholy and reflected her as in bits of brilliant glass.

“Most beautiful Madame,” he said. “To-night and every night, you are glorious.”

“Thank you, Monsieur,” she answered, and disengaging herself from his insistent stare, she went

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quickly, thankful to escape from further word with him.

The Hall was filling satisfactorily. That the concert should take place in this particular hall was a triumph for Sylvus, an acknowledgment of his drawing power. His impresario had shown great faith and some daring in attempting it. Already there was sufficient audience to promise a brilliant evening. The fact that Sylvus was blind advertised to no small degree his musical talent.

Nona skirted the aisle near the wall, wishing to see and not be seen. There was permissible pride in connecting with her husband this broken, irregular pattern of color and sound, the rustle and whisper of an advancing tide, creak of orchestra seats, rattle of programs. She noticed one or two of the right people — a big musical critic, hunched in his seat, looking bored and sleepy, a rival violinist, standing dapper and supercilious, his back to the stage, envisaging in foreign manner the stream of arrivals. His eyes caught Nona's and he bowed low with exaggerated deference.

She made her way to the upper row of boxes. She had only to look for Worden to be guided to her place.

Worden's hair was an infallible signpost. It grew wild and red, flaming fiercely leonine against the background of the women's pale chiffons.

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She caught sight of him almost immediately. His generous red beard, a banner from his hair, topped the box. His voice boomed in careful whispers to Laura Dunn, who leaned quickly back in a chair by his side. Laura was the only woman in the world Worden professed to admire. Her profile was turned thoughtful now, the lines of her gray dress fitted reposefully her fine, rather full, figure.

As Nona came near, Worden stood up and waved a hand.

"We've been waiting here for a long time," he complained; "Sylvus should consider his public."

Nona laughed. "The public should consider Sylvus, my dear Richard."

"Public's more important than the individual." His eyes twinkled. "I'm part of it — so's Laura — chisel and pen. What more do you want as representatives?"

He stepped aside and Nona slipped by him. It was like passing a big tree. He sniffed luxuriously. "Good stuff you've got on your handkerchief," he said. "Athene, here" — he waved a hand toward Laura, — "*she* only uses cologne." The two women exchanged smiling glances.

There was a restless twittering in the waiting audience, a stir as of a flock of setting birds, a strong scent of people packed together, of stuffs and

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and laces, of sachet and steam heat. The crude lights swayed, heavy and powerful.

Then Sylvus came.

"Hush," said Nona.

But Richard and Laura had already assumed the pose of attention. Richard's big head with its angry shock of hair became immobilized; he leaned his elbows on the back of Laura's chair.

Nona glowed and trembled a little, waiting for the preluding applause. Sylvus walked alone to the front of the stage. He needed no guidance as he had before the concert familiarized himself with the ground. Nona thought with pride that his blindness was hard to realize.

He bowed, smiling faintly. The lights brought him forward, the big empty stage space accentuated his tall gauntness, seemed to carve him gently into an appealing figure. An inexpressible pathos hovered over his fine hair, thrown so freely back from his forehead, closed eyes, ascetic, almost harshly outlined nose and sensitive mouth.

Nona watched the scene, familiar with each detail. It was so she had first known him — standing unafraid, beautiful, before a less important public. How many women in the audience now were being impressed, just as she had been — how many romantic imaginations were being troubled? Petroff gave the tuning note and Sylvus touched the

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open strings with his bow, his head bent forward, his ear quick to a slight needed twist of the screws. Nona glanced at Petroff. He was wedged between chair and piano, as if once seated, he could never rise.

Now Sylvus stood ready. She knew that the sounds of the room reached him remotely, the surface breath which stirs the vast, uneasy breast of a close-packed house — the thousand and one almost indefinable, fine-edged sounds which trouble a directed mass of silence, sighs, whispers, coughs, sudden creaks of wheezy chairs — all unclaimed, unidentified as betrayals.

She looked at the program again. The Sonata in "C" minor, one of her favorites.

Petroff announced the theme in a phrase which was like a big decision, unhesitatingly made. Sylvus poised his bow, descended on sure wing, captured the theme and carried it soaring.

He stood braced, swaying almost imperceptibly, as if on a rolling ship. An invisible wind swept his hair over his forehead in superb disarray, his closed eyes communed, his head rested on the heart of a best beloved. The sweet voice of the Amati sang like a woman in grave transport of soul; the ivory notes of the piano sustained on calm shoulders, or flew beside, ahead, supporting the underflow of sound. Sylvus's tone was even and fine. The

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beautiful fabric of movements with scarcely a pause for rest, flew on clear and noble through white countries of contemplation.

The air of the hall, at first resistant and stiff, yielded and became pliable as the thin, glass-winged violin notes drifted away in serene hosts. Sylvus played as a soul who has not yet suffered.

For Nona the music divinely rocked an army of irreverent thoughts — her eyes wandered. She joyed in the sense of listening masses; watching jealously the angle of heads and necks, the curve of backs; she heard the faint turning of leaves from the score of a man sitting in the next box. Once she moved so that she could look at him. The black dots on the page of his score failed to represent meaning to her. Again she noticed the flitting of thought on a few profiles near her — a dyspeptic-colored critic, an artist who coughed now and then a smoke cough, a serious-browed editor. She felt Laura beside and Richard behind her. She knew Laura's expression while listening to Sylvus play. It was always the same — two lines like parentheses, which never showed at other times, appeared on either side of the firm mouth. The upper lip pressed tight, a sense of repressed tragedy shadowed the lower part of the face. But the eyes schooled, remained calm, and the smooth, parted hair gave control to the forehead.

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The picture of Laura dismissed, it seemed now to Nona as if there were a tense weight of galleries above her which must fall under the tremendous pressure of distended worlds of ears. Then she forgot to think, gradually overwhelmed by the force of the advancing music. Everything lost significance. She felt herself dissolving, fusing — the hall swam before her eyes, and she closed them.

There came to her an image of autumn leaves dropping from a high tree, one by one. They thought as they dropped, and lay quiet at the end of their journey, still thinking . . . the pile of them mounted higher and higher. . . .

This image floated away and she dreamed of a boat which sailed forever with silver wings over glassy water, neither sea nor lake . . . she dreamed of a sky without horizon line. . . . Her shoulders drew up and forward, her head sank between them. She was ready to be propelled and launched into space.

Then in a haze of quickening notes the great finale came to its last chord. The sensation, exquisite, transcendental, which was never going to end — ended. She was vaguely disappointed in the applause which was good and steady but not impassioned.

But Richard stamped and shouted hoarse bravos.

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Laura's hands met and parted, steadily, evenly in rhythm.

His violin lowered, Sylvus smiled. Petroff beside him, bowing solemnly, took his arm and led him away. They were both recalled. Nona leaned forward in the box, expectantly. Sylvus had not yet turned towards her, as he always did. She felt disappointed. But now as if on a pivot, he faced direct and smiled. The smile was unmistakably for her. She half rose in her chair, and her answering smile was glowing, wonderfully warm. It seemed impossible that he could not see her impulse towards him.

Then the door of her box creaked and opened to intermittent visitors. She greeted them all happily. At first hint of invasion, Richard and Laura disappeared. Laura never lent herself to chatter, and Richard confessed frankly to being an unsociable bear.

Among those who hurried flattering to her side, she welcomed with greatest satisfaction, Felix Moffat, a friend of her débutante days.

Felix Moffat was just back from Paris, where he had taken a brilliant diploma in architecture at the Beaux Arts. He spoke patronizingly of Sylvus's magnificent performance, then turned admiring attention to Nona. "You manage to look different from the others. How do you do it?" he said.

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"Oh, well," she laughed, "it's a question of that mysterious thing, personality, is n't it?"

"I saw a friend of yours at the opera to-night," he volunteered later in the conversation. "Allen Dietrich — delightful fellow. Got brains, too. I can't see why he lives over here."

"Oh, did you? Whom was he with?" said Nona.

"He was in the pretty Mrs. Deland's box. She usually manages to attach the most worth-while men in town in her wake. Wonder why — she's such a little goose."

Dietrich had not said with whom was his engagement, and after all there was no reason why he should, especially since he had heard her say that she disliked Mrs. Deland.

"What was the opera?" she asked carelessly.

"Same old Faust. I only stayed out an act. I wanted to hear Leete. You can be proud of him, *chère* Madame. I myself don't care for Beethoven, but that proves nothing."

"Well, no one plays him as Sylvus does," she said. "I wanted Mr. Dietrich to come, but he had the opera. I want him to meet Richard Worden."

"By the way, how's that hobby of Worden's going? I meant to ask him, but he disappeared before I could reach the box."

"He can talk about it better than any one else.

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Ask *him*," said Nona. "He talks about nothing now but young American art."

When Felix had gone, she leaned back in her chair, suddenly inexplicably tired for the second time that evening. Her mood of content slid in descending scale of vague relaxation. The hall, the lights, the people keyed to an acute upper note irritated her, now that she sagged below them.

The door of the box opened and Worden stamped in grumbling. "He's a fool. Knows no more about violins than I do about aeroplanes."

"Who?" said Nona.

Laura moved quietly into her seat. "Richard's been fighting with a critic," she explained. "Silly boy to fight any one, especially a critic."

"Do you know what the man had the insolence to tell me?" growled Richard pulling at his beard with his big, powerful hand. "Said Sylvus would be the greatest violinist of the day, if he were n't blind. Said his music showed he was blind — perfect technique and all that, but no emotion — white music."

"I think it *is* white," said Nona unexpectedly.

Richard gasped and stopped pulling at his beard. "Why, my dear girl, what nonsense! Sylvus is a classicist — not an emotional fraud."

"People ought to be sentimental," replied Nona suddenly.

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“Well, Sylvus *has* sentiment too, of the great kind. Has n’t he, Athene? *He’s* got something better than nerves.”

Her attention drifted and she did n’t answer. Now she longed with fantastic impulse to rise from her seat and run — run out of the hall into the cool night streets. The air seemed oppressive to a point of suffering. Just then the stage door opened to Sylvus, but the grip of his playing had gone from her. The Kreutzer Sonata had no message. It passed on in dull notes, snipped as with scissors from a long dry roll. She fidgeted, turning her head here and there.

It seemed eternities before the concert was over — the calls and recalls, the unending babble in the lobby afterwards, the coming and going of faces which meant nothing to her, the last hearty good-bys of Richard and Laura; it seemed more eternities before she and Sylvus sat again in the carriage.

Sylvus looked pale. His febrile, delicate hands lay limp at his sides. But he was eager and happy and talked on, unconscious at first of her mood. As soon as she spoke, however, her voice betrayed her, and he questioned in tender concern, “You are tired, Nona?”

“Yes.”

He felt for her hand and held it a moment. “Your palm is moist and hot. Poor darling.”

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But she knew that she was not really tired, and she despised suddenly her mood. "It was beautiful," she said.

"I felt them, Nona. It was inspiring to hear them call to me. It made me so happy, and then, best of all, I knew that you were listening."

"Oh, Sylvus," she cried, her hand on his shoulder; she leaned her head against him, "dear Sylvus."

"We have everything, have n't we, my sweet — everything." He sat still, erect, his face shining gently.

"Yes, everything, Sylvus," she sighed.

CHAPTER III

THE Leete apartment was in an old corner house, by which the life of Second Avenue flowed thickly. St. Mark's church, opposite, stood watch over its harvest of lean graves. The bells, deep and hollow, sounded of prophetic tongue, and a near-by clock clipped away quarters, halves and hours warningly. In the spring, Italians from neighboring tenements played guitars and sang nostalgic tenor melodies, which rose above the harshness of traffic, reaching the Leete balcony. With first burgeoning of green life, vines spread to this balcony, climbing wide in scarves of sea color, and red geraniums grew like drops of spring blood. But in the autumn and winter, the balcony seemed to shrivel and become pinched, the bared vine stalks hung like discarded rags from their lattice work and the old house stood uncovered to crisp bite of winter air and driving snow flakes. To-day there had been freeze and nip abroad. The street looked wan as if made of gray ice, chapped and cracked. It was the veritable heralding of

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winter. The church steeple stretched taut to dull skies.

Inside the house it was warm.

Nona stayed alone in the early twilight. On the piano a big church candle of ocher wax flickered unsubstantial, smoke-tipped. The silver tea-set before the fire gave moonstone reflection in the shadows, and squatted suave and ready for use; the purple hanging flattened black against the wall; and in their cage the canaries settled to daffodil tufts of repose. There was breath of mimosa and incense in the air.

As the fire glow swayed and groped forward, it caught occasional glints of Nona's face and hair. She moved about the room, arranging and rearranging its details—a vase, a book; adjusting a cushion or a chair, seeming to leave with each thing touched, a little of herself. Through the green silk curtains of the long window the street glare filtered, subdued. She drew closer the curtains, and wandering over to the piano began to sing in a full, rich but untrained contralto. She sang a song which had once been dedicated to her:

“A maiden sat at a spinning wheel,
And as she spun, she dreamed of love.” . .

This afternoon she did not finish the song, but rose from the piano abruptly with the crime of a

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discord still vibrating in the air. She lifted her arms above her head and her fingers met in Gothic arch for a moment. Then her humor betrayed itself in an impatient shake of her shoulders, and she turned back to the window.

She had invited Allen Dietrich to tea and he was late. She hated men to be late when they had engagements with her, and she hated waiting for anybody or anything. Allen Dietrich had not even the excuse of being an intimate. She decided never to ask him again, at least not alone in this too flattering way. She jerked the curtains aside and with her hand rubbed the mist from the window-panes. There was a slight fog, cars thundered by, prompt and heavy in their passage, making unwieldly noise as if always going down hill; blurs of passers-by drifted across shiny pavements, and the window cracks exhaled damp.

Nona peered out at the twilight and listened. She could never bear equably any form of expectancy. Allen Dietrich's delay in arriving interfered with the plan of an hour which was ticking away. He was wasting her time. She resented the quarter strike of the clock, the prepared graciousness and tea for a guest who could disappoint her.

She wished now that she had gone with Sylvus to Worden's studio. Antonin would be making tea.

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Richard would of course be ranting about American Art, and Sylvus would be listening. There was the couch and cushions, the cool feeling of marble and clay about, and the littered old stuffs, dear to Worden's heart, trailing over the big, comfortable chairs. Sylvus and Antonin, his faithful shadow, were often in that studio, she thought with a moment's pang of jealousy. Then her face softened. After all, Sylvus went practically nowhere but to Worden.

Poor Sylvus! How beautifully he loved her! She smiled with sudden tenderness as she thought back to the time when she had first seen him and had been fascinated by the romantic pathos of his situation. She, who even in the conventional atmosphere of her youth, had always secretly dreamed of the unusual. It had all seemed like a story-book, her gradual enthronement in Sylvus's gentle soul, as the perfect woman. Life tendered her romance and her girlhood had eagerly accepted it. So it had happened.

She thought now of Sylvus's mother, whose heroic devotion to her blind son was in itself a story. She was a small, startled creature who had clung to life for his sake and died cradled by the thrill of his growing talent. For it was this fragile little mother who placed the first violin in Sylvus's hands, who, having been starved of soul herself,

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fought to leave the boy something beautiful, a world within his closed eyes; it was she, who, conquering her timidity, had gone to the schools for the blind, taken from them the help they had to offer, and from what she learned herself in these schools, taught her son to read, opened to him all the great highroad of freedom. She had worked upon memory of his few years of sight, and had given him, before she died, fifteen years of utter devotion. He often spoke of his mother to Nona, but never of his father. The father had been a whirlwind of bluster, a brutal egoist, narrow-minded and money-making. After six years' pride in a son, savage at the seventh year's blow, he had abandoned the boy to his mother. Sylvus was of no more use to him as an heir.

Nona shuddered as she thought of these things. It was seldom enough she thought of them. But the clock striking suggested that time was still slipping away and no sign of Allen Dietrich. If he did not come within a few moments, she would put on her hat and go over to Worden's. She went once more to the window.

A taxi-motor buzzed down the street and stopped at the door. So it was he at last! Flattening her nose against the pane, she could see through the iron work of the balcony. But she no longer cared very much whether it was he or not. She dropped

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the curtain, all 'tensity relaxed, realizing, as she always did, that the proportion of her mood was overdrawn.

She sat down at the piano and deliberately played — playing on after the bell rang, as if to force it to ring a second time. But it did not, and wishing Antonin were at home she went slowly to the door. Allen Dietrich, hat in hand, smiled down at her.

“I'm sorry I'm late,” he said easily.

“Late — are you late? I did n't notice.”

He looked at her, still smiling. “Then I'm not late — if you did n't notice.”

As they came into the room, his first glance approved of the shadows, the fire, the tea set and vague blur of vases against the lighter wall.

“It's good to be here.”

“I'll light the lamp,” she said.

“No, don't, the candle's better.” He turned and examined her appreciatively. “You belong to the room. The effect of that gray gown is stunning with your hair.”

“Oh, my hair!” she laughed, entering naturally into personalities. “My hair is a source of great trouble to me.”

She busied herself with the hot-water kettle, flared a match and set the wick to burn. Then she leaned forward and coaxed the fire dexterously

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with a poker. Her hair warmed to its highest tone in the orange light. Dietrich was apparently the kind of man upon whom nothing was wasted, no conscious or unconscious play of line, gesture or inflection. He seemed to consider effect legitimate in women.

"My hair looks dyed," she went on. "No one believes me when I say it is n't. It makes me look like an actress."

"The ambition of many respectable women," said Dietrich gravely. "You should n't complain."

"I wonder if any woman is *really* respectable way down deep in her secret self. If Sylvus heard me, he would be shocked. But respectable is a very elastic word, is n't it?"

"It's often misused. You spoke of Mr. Leete. He is n't here to-day?"

"He had to go out. He was sorry to miss you, but you must come again when he is here. He usually *is* here."

The water in the kettle bubbled and purred.

"A cigarette?" she offered her own case.

"Thank you. I know you'll forgive me. I only smoke these. Try one. They're the Trecentisimi. A friend who lives in Italy keeps me supplied."

He had a particularly delightful manner, she noticed, of holding his cigarette case. It was in his hands, what a fan might be to a graceful woman.

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"You make me think," she said irrelevantly, accepting a Trecentisimi and walking over to the big church candle. "You make me think of a well-bound eighteenth-century book in old French, a crest seal ring and a musketeer's sword."

He leaned his head back against the chair, and laughed like a boy.

"Dear lady — why?"

She waved a vague gesture and came near the fire circle. "I don't know. It's a crazy game I play sometimes. Every one reminds me of different things. Sylvus, for instance, makes me think of a crystal globe and a flute."

"And yourself?"

"One lump?" She hovered a hand delicately over the sugar bowl. "Cream, lemon or rum? We really should n't have smoked before tea. I smoke too much anyway. Oh, I remind myself —?" She frowned in thought, the tea poised over her cup. "You find that out for yourself."

He laughed again. "One lump and lemon, please. You're deliciously original. Let me see — you remind me of lots of things, you know. First of all, burnt orange hair and eyes da Vinci would have enjoyed painting and —"

"That is n't fair."

"Why not? I follow your methods. I make you think of old books because you know my hobby,

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of a seal ring, because I wear one. The only thing I can't understand is the sword. Is it because I'm tall and thin?"

"Oh, it's a much more subtle game than that," said Nona. "But the sword is on account of the way you brush your hair, and your mustache and that little goatee of yours."

She looked at him critically, her head to one side. "Tell me about yourself," she said. "I've seen and met you everywhere. You never look bored and you never look amused. I've often wondered about you." The hour was intimate—an hour for confessions. She wanted him to talk as she would talk with slight encouragement; she wanted him, over the two friendly tea-cups, to abandon the baffling ease of his pose, to allow her to see how like all other men he was. She had spoken the truth when she told him that she had often wondered about him.

"Tell me about yourself instead," he parried. "For instance, are you as restless as you look?"

"More so. What an observer!"

"An observer never troubles with the obvious," he said and raised his cup.

"Have some cake. I was going to forget to give you some. Oh, I'm *all* obvious. I could n't hide myself as you do."

"Why should I be hiding?" He was evidently

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much amused at the idea. "Must every one be hiding who seems to have nothing to show?"

"Yes," she answered boldly. "It's often a form of self-preservation."

"A comfortable, confirmed, old bachelor," he began lightly; "no occupation, an innocent passion for worm-eaten books and morocco bindings, a controlled respect, admiration and perhaps a bit of fear for such seductive people as you — and you have the picture. Is it interesting?"

He handed her his cup for more tea.

"Why aren't you in business?" she persisted.

"A tender point, dear lady. I'm no use in a race."

"You don't seem American."

"Oh, but I am. Is n't it enough to live in America nowadays to be American? If I'd been born with a talent, I should have worked hard, but alas! . . ." he sighed humorously. "I'm not even a useful dilettante. I must satisfy myself with other people's talent while envy gnaws."

Nona leaned toward him.

"Why don't you try?" The woman given chance, bolstered, suggested, interfered.

He shrugged his shoulders. "In the forties a man is or is n't. I'm not! I've got my bit of real estate to putter over. I love this terrible city. When the wander-call comes, as it does, I pack my

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bag and am off to Paris or Italy. I've a few sous to spend on my library and I'm alone. After all, it's not so bad. Reciting my meager possessions makes them sound quite like blessings."

"But," cried Nona, "forty is n't old!"

"You're very kind. But I can't even *stay* forty. *Tempus fugit!* And where's a remedy?" He smiled at her tolerantly.

She balanced on the arm of her chair, staring at him through half-closed eyes. She was as absorbed in the question of his destiny as if he had asked first for her advice. Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"I know. I've found just what you want. Now don't say a word until I tell you about it. You've heard of Richard Worden, the sculptor?" Dietrich nodded.

"He's a great friend of ours. Richard has one mania in life and that's young American Art. He's giving his whole time and thought and money to advancing it. He says it's the ultimate expression of our commercial prosperity, the final triumph of our progress."

Allen interrupted. "But my dear Mrs. Leete, it seems to me that we're energetically engaged in becoming artists now."

"Yes, but it is n't our *own* art that's being given

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the greatest chance," said Nona. "Most of it is imported, because it's more expensive and we like expensive things. We're not protecting our own national form of expression. Richard believes first"—she ticked off remembered facts on uncertain fingers—"first, there should be a Secretary of Fine Arts in Washington; secondly, there should be one big Art University with American professors; there should be Federal Schools of Architecture, and National Opera Houses where *first* consideration would be given to American music." Her eyes sparkled. It seemed to her as if this cause of Worden's had become suddenly vital and teeming with possibilities. She wanted to talk more, to unfold all she knew before Allen's attentive listening.

"Why, do you know," she went on, "that half the singing teachers abroad are Americans and that our people go over to take lessons with their own compatriots? That ought n't to be. And take the painting. . . . All this modern decadent art movement raging in France and Germany is *bad* for us. We can't digest it. We have n't been through the growth itself, the preparation of centuries, don't you see? That is the kind of thing civilization of a country should arrive at *itself*."

"Why, I don't think it's as bad as all that," said

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Allen. "We've got a fair amount of common sense. And we go to Europe to learn what's *old*, not what's new."

"Not any more," she declared. "They're mad over there to find something new. And we can't help but be influenced more strongly by the fever of the modern schools. Only it's the new that's wild and crazy — unhealthy, Richard calls it. And the big truth all the while of the New lies here where we're young and red-blooded."

"I thought that we were working magnificently to encourage our art. We have more and more schools. The West —"

"There you have it," she cried. "The West is Richard's hope. But he'll have to tell you himself. I've explained it wrong probably. I'm always vague. I *do* know though that he wants co-ordinated work, government supervision."

"A great dreamer, your friend," said Allen. "There are many arguments against Federal and municipal interference in private organizations. Politics lead a good way from Utopia."

"Yes, I suppose so. But wait until you hear Richard talk."

"And now," he smiled whimsically, "where do I come in?"

"Simply this — you're the kind of man to work with Richard. You know a lot of the people at

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Washington and some of the big journalists here. You're certainly intelligent enough."

"Thank you."

"Oh, you know what I mean. You could get it written up, make it popular — perhaps you might go out West and study the possibilities out there."

She would have sent him forth at once, an elegant pioneer, to reform artistic America.

"Woman of old," he murmured. "You should have lived in Crusade days."

She touched his arm with swift impulse. "Come with me to Richard's studio some day soon, will you?"

"With great pleasure."

There fell between them the silence of a subject finished and another to begin. But Allen was not a man for conversational effort. He leaned back in his chair and appeared willing to enjoy the comfortable relaxation suggested by his tea and cigarette. Nona fidgeted a little and looked at him a great deal. She liked his ease of manner, even his faint impertinence. Most men she had known strove harder to please.

"I'll light some more incense," she said suddenly. The Persian filigree incense burner of strange shape was always a favorite plaything. She bent over it, carefully measuring a brown

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powder that slid from its red box to a peaked mound. This she set alight, and holding the burner high in the cup of both hands, she walked a few steps, waving it. The thick smoke curled away in fantastic gray wraiths. The perfume seemed to envelop her sensuously. It was as if it were she whose breath came so sweet and clinging.

Allen watched her idly.

"How well you know how," he said. His voice had grown a shade familiar and teasing.

Unaccountably irritated, she put the incense holder on the table as if it had burnt her.

"Oh, why do you stop? You looked like a mysterious priestess."

"It's burning well enough now to be left alone," she said shortly, and turning her back to him, adjusted the rugged stems of huge yellow chrysanthemums in their long white vase.

"Dear me, have I offended the little lady?"

"Of course not. How could you have?"

He rose from his chair and strolled over to where she stood. She felt him near her and her expression softened in spite of the past instant's annoyance. But it seemed as if it were always he who forced upon her the initiative. He made no further attempt to relieve the slight strain in the atmosphere, but leaned against the piano and waited sign from her.

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"I wish you could have come the other night," she said at last. "Sylvus played magnificently."

"I'm sorry I could n't manage it." He made no mention of the opera or of Mrs. Deland.

"There was a place in the box for you. Mr. Worden and Miss Dunn were there."

"Is that the Miss Dunn who writes?"

"Yes. Is n't she wonderful? Do you know her things? She has great power, Laura has — she writes more like a man than a woman, although she does n't lose any of her femininity."

"I've only met her once or twice. Handsome, but rather cold, I should say."

"She is n't cold, really. She's simply concentrated," said Nona. "I never have known any one who minds their own business as Laura does. No one ever knows about her, either. Richard and we are her only intimate friends. I think she had a romance a long time ago, and she'll never have another. Poor Laura!"

"That is a melancholy thought," said Allen smiling. "She's good looking enough to have one any time, is n't she?"

"Oh, but she is n't that kind. Laura could n't care twice."

"Then don't pity her for her faithfulness to something big."

"I'm not."

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"Do you believe in one love of a life?" he said lightly.

"I've never —" she began, and stopped short. She was not sure of what she had intended to say.

"You've never —?"

"I've never discussed it seriously. It depends so on the person," she said.

"Will you pardon me?" he gave a discreet glance at the clock. "How the moments fly in your charming company. But I must unfortunately tear myself away."

"Oh, must you?"

"Don't forget your promise to take me to Worden's studio."

"Indeed I won't." She put out her hand, expecting the old-world gesture and was vaguely disappointed when he did not raise it to his lips.

Instead he bowed and held it firmly.

"Good-by — and thank you," he said. "You will reform me, if you see much of me."

"Well, I want to," she answered.

CHAPTER IV

WORDEN jabbed his broad thumb viciously at a helpless lump of clay and stepped back to squint at an effect.

"If they were all good-looking, I could stand 'em," he said.

"My dear Richard," remarked Sylvus gently, "you of all people should see beauty in women."

"Feel that nose," said Worden for answer, and guided Sylvus over to a bust in the making, perched on its wooden stand. "That woman declares she's got a Bourbon nose. They lie so about themselves," he continued in an aggrieved voice and pulled wrathfully at his beard as if in some dim way it was the fault of the beard.

Sylvus's fingers traveled sensitively over the criminal feature.

"It's rather hilly," he said smiling; "have n't you exaggerated it a bit?"

"I've improved it, that's what *I've* done! My Lord, man! If I had a woman with a nose like that, for a wife, I'd throw clay at her."

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"You ought to get married, dear Richard," said Sylvus.

Worden grunted. "I'm gouty always when I think of the same woman creeping about my studio every day, getting jealous of my models and prying."

"Oh, but suppose you found a woman like Nona. . . ."

"Lovely woman, Nona," said Richard, "all right for *you*."

"She's wonderful," murmured Sylvus. "You know Browning's lines —

"Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music — flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre."

"Is n't it so, Richard?"

"Well, no one need be so very sorry for her."

"Always near me," went on Sylvus, eagerly, stretching out his long arm as if to greet an advancing Nona. "No wonder that the world is beautiful with such women alive."

Worden cleared his throat violently, wheeled about and strode over to the lump of clay. His hand threatened its annihilation. But he touched it like a gentle god carving an ant.

Sylvus stood contented, light in his face. Then, his arm still outstretched, he walked as one who

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knows his way to the back of the studio which was screened by a heavy tapestry curtain.

"Look out," warned Worden, "I've moved things about a bit since yesterday."

"I won't fall."

"You're always mussing my sheep and goats," grumbled Worden, watching Sylvus; "behind that curtain's all that's best of me."

"There should n't *be* any curtain. I can't bear to have you hide these things, as if you were ashamed of them."

He drew the curtain aside. In an alcove loomed three statues. They shone, white and startling, against a dull background of gray. Richard came forward and stood, his hands in the pockets of his working-blouse.

"I can't have those knocked about," he said. "I did them, God knows how! I never could do them again. Why, Sylvus boy, my reputation would be gone, if I showed this stuff. I'd lose my job as a bust maker."

"No, you would n't." Sylvus advanced gently and stood, small and slight, before one of the pedestals.

"Damn it all!" stormed Richard suddenly, "I'm doing all a fellow can. I'm no genius. If I were, don't you suppose I'd smash every darn bust I've made to atoms? I'd starve, I'd eat clay, I'd be

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a flaming-eyed, wild-haired madman! No sir — I'm a plodder, that's all I am."

"You're a fine artist," said Sylvus gravely.

"Besides I've other things to do," his voice boomed louder as he talked. "Sometimes I think I was n't a genius on purpose. These things," he waved toward the silent figures, "these things belong to the time when I was n't sure. If I'd had a chance at some ideas, I might have gone on, but Lord! there are others coming to do what I wanted to do. I see them now. Here —" he drew Sylvus brusquely after him to the furthest recess of the alcove, "here, I did this the other day. It is n't finished — never will be! It's just them — the ones I see, who are going ahead."

"A frieze?" Sylvus's hand passed rapidly over the clay plaque. "I feel figures — many of them — fine lines, Richard, fine, long lines and draperies. What is it — Greek spirit? Gods — soldiers — what?"

"It's them — the young ones," cried Richard. "It's the army of them — fine, clean fellows, heads high, hair blowing in the wind, splendid bodies — and unafraid, Sylvus boy, unafraid. I've got 'em all there — artists, musicians, writers, architects, athletes. The ones ahead are walking pretty slowly — roads twisted. See? Feel it? Their feet and hands are tied. But those behind are running,

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pushing, free handed. They spring from clean, new earth. Feel the bend forward of their necks — good line there, eh?”

“Yes — yes,” Sylvus shook the hair back from his forehead with a quick motion as if he were running in the wind. “And what’s this in this man’s hand?”

“It’s a trumpet — call to arms.”

“You must finish this.”

“Can’t,” said Richard, moodily. “Some day, if I live to see it, when my Art University goes through, I’ll hand this over to one of the young ones, just as a starter. He’ll finish it for one of the buildings. I’d like to have a hand in those buildings.”

“You will — surely you will.” Richard shook his tawny mane. “Don’t know,” he said laconically; “does n’t look like it now.” With one of his queer, abrupt gestures he turned, stalked back to his busts, and busied himself covering with wet cloths the one upon which he had been working.

But Sylvus lingered in the alcove, touching the unfinished frieze and from the frieze he groped to the nearest statue. “This is Light,” he said as if to himself, and felt of the sandaled feet and lower draperies.

“*You* ought to know it. It’s your face and hands.”

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"When I was fifteen. It was wonderful of you to call it Light."

"Well, if any one in the world *sees*, it's you," growled Richard. "One's only got to copy your expression. I wish there were more blind like you. Here, it's tea-time! Where's that lazy old brute of an Antonin? Probably chattering with the French maid who belongs to the miniature woman next door. Miniatures and a French maid — Lord! — and she calls herself an artist!" He banged upon the door into the hall and stood listening.

"Yes, there he is, the old satyr. Antonin! Antonin!"

"*Oui, oui*, Monsieur. I come!" Antonin appeared, chuckling and rubbing hands which were virgin of the white gloves of servitude. "Ah, Monsieur, if her Madame knew what is that little *femme de chambre*."

"You keep away from such minxes."

"*Oui*, Monsieur Worden." The old man shuffled busily into the room. "Monsieur is right," he sighed; "Monsieur does not wish me to arrange a little the studio. If Monsieur could but see the studio of Madame à côté. It is of an order which is marvelous." He looked disapprovingly over the odds and ends of stuffs tumbled on the floor, the big chairs at odd angles, the white dust which covered everything.

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Richard laughed heartily. "This is no woman's manicure parlor. You leave my things alone and make us tea."

Antonin pottered away in the corner, where stood an old brass samovar on a rickety wicker table.

"Nona may come," said Sylvus; "I told Antonin to bring cake in case she came. Did you?"

"Yes, Monsieur. I have with me the kind of little cakes which Madame likes."

Worden hovered like an uncouth butterfly over a bowl of chrysanthemums on the tea table.

"I hear some one in the hall," said Sylvus suddenly. "I'm *sure* it's Nona. Antonin, open the door. Yes, it *is*. Don't you hear her laugh?"

"I wonder who the devil that is with her," said Worden in annoyed tones. "Ugh!" he shook his shoulders like a big dog wading out of a sea bath. "I'll wager it's the Mitchell woman." He looked swiftly about the studio, crossed to the alcove and pulled together the tapestry curtain. "What on earth does Nona bring *Her* here for?"

Sylvus rose from the divan and stood waiting. The old servant sneaked a pair of soiled, white gloves from his pocket and hurried them on, grumbling under his breath.

"Dear me, it's quite dark, isn't it, Sweetie?" drifted a very high voice from the hall. "You go

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on ahead, Nona and Allen. Remember I can't see you, so it's quite safe. How quaint the idea of having halls dark!" Worden made a wry face.

Nona swept in first. "Hello! Richard — oh, my dear, I'm glad you're still here," she cried, sighting Sylvus. She was all sparkle and warmth. Her hands as she touched him fluttered unpoised and moist. Allen remained correct and ceremonious near the door. She darted over to him like a child and dragged him forward. Mrs. Mitchell entered effusively behind him.

"I've wanted you two to meet," cried Nona, "Mr. Dietrich — Mr. Worden."

Worden gave cordial grip of hand which enveloped and kept Allen's response. "Glad you came," he said heartily.

"Oh, Mr. Worden, why do you think I'm here?" gushed Mrs. Mitchell.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Richard bluntly.

"She wants a bust," explained Nona, her cheeks aglow. She pushed Mrs. Mitchell in front of Allen, and took his arm. "You and Richard can talk later," she said.

He turned to her smiling. She gave sense of electric, dancing life — her restlessness suggested and dissolved into a thousand rippling attitudes and gestures.

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“Antonin — tea! I see the water boiling. I hope there’s cake,” she called.

Sylvus smiled radiantly. “Yes, there’s cake — the kind you like. Have you had a nice afternoon, Nona?” He found his way to her.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “I never knew one *could* do so many things in an afternoon, did you, Mr. Dietrich? Mr. Dietrich’s wonderful, Sylvus. He’s taken me sight-seeing in New York. He knows everything. We’ve been to an exhibition of Field’s water-colors — Field’s that man who’s doing weird modern work, Sylvus. He’s a pupil of Mathis. He paints men *all* green, dancing on savage red backgrounds. The green men seem to be sliding off the canvas. They’re the color of tough salad.”

“Oh, that must be horrible,” said Sylvus.

“Well, it’s the Modern School. Field studied in Paris, you know. He’s just back. We went to the Metropolitan Museum afterwards. I must say the difference was stupefying — was n’t it, Mr. Dietrich? Oh, I must hear what Dorothy’s telling Richard about her bust.” She was off, leaving Dietrich and Sylvus together.

Sylvus smiled. “Nona loves to see things,” he said.

“Oh, I *hope* he’ll do it,” Mrs. Mitchell cried to Nona. “He says he’s awfully busy, but he *must*

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do it for me." She had unfastened her furs and touched adjustingly the gardenias at her belt. Her eyes, big and resistless, were fixed upon Worden.

"It was the new coiffure that gave me the idea," she went on. "You see it's quite Madonna — rather trying, of course, but with an *oval* face one *can* wear it. Nona dear, it does look well on you. Now have you ever seen the death mask of that drowned girl, Mr. Worden? All artists know it. It's for sale in those quaint shops around the Quartier Latin in Paris."

"If it's the head I think it is, she's no more a drowned girl than you or I," said Richard grimly. "She was the wife of the man who made it."

"Oh, don't — don't!" cried Mrs. Mitchell. "Please let me imagine that she was drowned. It makes her so much more interesting. Now, I thought, you know, that you might take that idea for me — not quite, of course — but something between the present coiffure and the *expression* of that head."

She smiled trustingly.

Worden nodded. "I think I know. The hair gives the Madonna touch to a girl supposed to be drowned, and you wish me to make you a cross between the coiffure and the death mask. Perfectly."

Mrs. Mitchell laughed. "I do *love* you artists,

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don't you, Sweetie? They always *understand* everything. You're lucky to be married to one. Do you think I ever *could* look like that death mask? Some one said the other day that there was something about my eyes — but, of course, one's friends, you know! She thrills me — she's haunting, I should say, and *so* creepy thinking of her, in spite of what that brutal Mr. Worden says about her never having been drowned." She sent forth an arch glance to Richard, which seemed to affect him but little.

"Oh, Richard has no imagination," said Nona wickedly.

"No, no, I have n't at all — not a particle."

Mrs. Mitchell looked bewildered for a moment. "Dear me, I thought one *had* to have, to be an artist. Oh, Nona, you bad creature — I saw you wink at Mr. Worden. You're poking fun at poor, stupid me."

Tea was served. Nona found place on the divan beside Allen, while Mrs. Mitchell, tea-cup in hand, flitted volubly about the studio, followed by an anxious Worden. Sylvus sat quiet in the big chair, with no effort at chatter.

The light from the red-shaded lamp gave depth to silhouettes, cast secrecy over the white marble busts. Nona reclined plially on an elbow among the cushions, her head propped high.

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"It's been a nice afternoon," she said and looked to Allen.

"It has." He held his tea-cup balanced on his knee. She noticed appreciatively how well bred were his hands.

"I want you to show me all those other things you have told me about," she said. "I love beautiful things, you know, but I need to be shown them. I'm a trifle lazy."

He looked at her for a fraction of time, and she returned the look full in his eyes. "Well?"

But he kept silence.

"What's the matter with you?" she whispered, straightening the droop of her head.

"Nothing."

"You're very funny, my dear man. Sometimes you seem positively sulky. Other times you look at me — well, if your reputation were n't so fleckless, I'd think —"

"You'd think?" he questioned gravely.

"I've only talked, really talked, with you two or three times," she said, avoiding his question, "and yet it seems as if I'd known you a long, long time."

He bent suddenly forward to put the tea-cup on a small table beyond her. The cloth of his sleeve brushed her hand. "I beg your pardon," he said,

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and glanced over to where Sylvus sat, peacefully absorbed in his own thoughts.

Nona straightened and sat forward.

"Sylvus!" she called.

But before he could answer, Mrs. Mitchell, who had been babbling away to Worden, rushed over to Nona. "There 's no use," she declared. "There 's no use talking. I *adore* studios. Don't you?" Her eyes smiled at Allen. He rose at her approach and edged toward Worden.

"Red lights," she went on happily, "and Mr. Worden with that fascinating hair of his and his quaint ways and the beautiful patient face of your husband." She spoke loudly, as if Sylvus, being blind, must also be deaf and perhaps dumb.

"You 're very kind," Sylvus said in his gentle voice, "but I am not as patient as I should be, Mrs. Mitchell."

She started in obvious surprise that he had heard her, and put her lorgnette up to her eyes to stare better at him. "Oh, I *beg* your pardon, dear Mr. Leete. We lay-people are *so* clumsy with our adjectives. I am always saying the wrong thing when I 'm with *clever* people."

In the corner Allen and Worden were talking — Worden with big gestures, Allen more quietly.

"There would have to be a few constitutional

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changes," Worden was saying. "The Government should become more directly interested in national art."

"But that would be difficult," objected Allen. "There seems to me one great drawback to a general brotherhood of arts in this country, and that is the division of America into states. It can't be active as a *whole* as well as, say France. Each state has its own climatic influence and practically its own pride and government. The art of California, for instance, will always be much more Latin in expression than the sturdier art of the Middle West."

"Yes," cried Worden, "but that is because, as yet, there is no central force of expression, no compelling magnet. In the fusion of all those influences, the brotherhood at least of *ideals* and *wills*, the boundary line of states artistically need not exist. If the Government should provide encouragement, say, in a National University to be erected, I should suggest, in the West, then all that is American for generations to come, could solidify, give and take influence. From this, I believe, would develop a distinct originality. Because now I do not *feel* originality in our people. I feel a tremendous indomitable ambition to progress, an egoism which has so far proclaimed itself mainly commercial. Now I want the *soul* of the American race."

"Yes," said Allen, reflectively, "there is undoubt-

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edly much in what you say. But, my dear fellow, what *is* American? Where is the primordial germ, so to speak? I've heard that our only original art lies among the Indians."

"That has been a good beginning musically," said Worden. "Our young composers have intelligently turned in that direction, but I don't believe that is the secret of the future American art. I don't see its furtherance in the fields of painting, sculpture and architecture. Start from there, perhaps, but it will never be intellectually sufficient."

"Indian music is decidedly limited," interrupted Sylvus who had been attentively listening. "Its advantage is its Nature call, its barbarism, from which all music must spring, and I think, its melancholy. It gives us the advantage of a sounding note."

"And besides," went on Worden, "the Indians don't represent the colossal vitality of our present race."

"Where is the secret then?" asked Allen.

Worden waved half a circle with his vigorous arm. "In our earth's natural architecture," he said. "In our mountains, in the blazing deserts of the West, in our canyons, in our rivers and in the noble calm of our untutored ones who have, thank God, **not** all migrated to the Beaux Arts."

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"But have we an instinctive enough conception of beauty to trust ourselves?"

"I think so, although first of all we're a utilitarian people. If we lose self-consciousness we can find our real instinct of the beautiful," pronounced Worden gravely.

"Why," cried Nona, "the average American taste is hideous, Richard. Look at the shops that don't import—look at the houses in the suburbs, what horrid untemperamental things they are—look at the narrow-minded Puritanism of us—of our middle classes—because after all it's they who count. They fight against *daring* in art, and they always will."

"My dear Nona, it's our strain of Puritanism which should control the danger of decadence—a too early decadence," said Sylvus gently. "Perhaps even it's our hope of something approaching classicism."

"Well, I know what they think about it abroad," pouted Nona. "They think we must be the most evil-minded race in the world. We make so much fuss over our morals. And the morals of a country do have something to do with its art."

"What rot!" growled Richard. "Oh, beg pardon, Nona. But you women do manage to say the stupidest—I mean the most inconsequent things."

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Here Mrs. Mitchell, who had been visibly restless, could contain her boredom no longer. "Good gracious, Nona!" she whispered, "how serious you all are. What's the use? I shall always go to Paris for my gowns. Isn't Allen absurd when he's serious? I've never seen him so comically interested in anything!"

"I think it's a relief to find a man like Mr. Dietrich who *is* interested in something beside gossip and business," retorted Nona with dignity.

"Little champion, you know he's crazy about you. And Allen's no easy fish to catch either," she giggled. "You're a witch."

Nona jumped abruptly from the divan. "Richard, I'm afraid we're boring Mrs. Mitchell to death. Give me a cigarette."

"A Trecentisimi?" Allen offered his case. "Light?"

He held out his own cigarette, and their hands met for a second, as Nona lit her cigarette from his. "Thank you," she said.

Mrs. Mitchell was roving again. "Why, you don't paint and draw *too*!" she exclaimed, stopping before a study of a nude. "Oh, you clever man!"

"That," said Worden grimly, "is the worst stuff in the world."

"I've always wished," Sylvus remarked, "that I could appreciate painting."

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"You poor man!" cried Mrs. Mitchell. "How dreadful it must be not to see!"

Nona went swiftly over to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "He sees things we can't," she said. Sylvus reached out his long delicate fingers and stroked a fold of her gown.

"What a *sweet* picture they make," said Mrs. Mitchell, stepping back a pace as if for a better view.

Allen strode to the other side of the studio and examined some rough drawings hanging on the wall. "Lots of power to these, Worden," he called.

"Oh, they're bad," said Richard.

"Well, I must go," announced Mrs. Mitchell, consulting a tiny, jeweled watch bracelet. "It's been too nice for words. I'm sure you're very good to allow an ignorant creature like myself to come here. Don't forget my bust, Mr. Worden. May I come next week and pose? I really *will* be on time. It's the only virtue I boast of — the others I'm afraid to show, for fear of being called 'bourgeoise.' Oh, by-the-way, how many sittings?"

"It depends," said Worden cautiously.

"I hope it will be done before my party next month. The party's really *given* for the bust. I sent out the cards as soon as I thought of being done. I've asked a lot of interesting people. I

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do know a *few*." She beamed good-naturedly and adjusted her veil.

"But, Mrs. Mitchell," protested Worden, "I can't possibly finish the thing in a month and do it well, with all my other work."

"Oh, dear," she stared at him helplessly. "Please *try* to. I'd hate to have the party without it. Nona, will you and Mr. Leete come to my box to-night? It's 'Butterfly' with that darling new singer—I forget her name. Allen, I'll expect you."

"We'd love to," cried Nona quickly; "would n't we, Sylvus?"

"I'm very sorry, dear," said Sylvus. "Petroff's coming in to try a new sonata with me. But of course you go."

"That will be nice, Nona dear. I'm sorry you can't come, Mr. Leete. Another time. . . . I don't dare to ask Mr. Worden. He never goes out."

"I never do for a fact," grunted Worden.

"Allen, will you go for Nona then, and see her home?"

Allen bowed rather ceremoniously. "That's arranged then. Good-by, every one. I'll give you a lift home, Allen."

She kissed Nona, shook hands effusively with the two men and swept out.

Allen Dietrich turned to Worden. "I'd like an-

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other chat with you," he said. "Lunch with me at the Players, will you, to-morrow?"

"With pleasure," said Worden, cordially.

"Until later then, Mrs. Leete." He shook hands with Sylvus, smiled at Nona and was gone.

"Oh, hurry, hurry, Sylvus," cried Nona. She felt fluttering and nervous to be off. "I must dress, you know."

The evening offered further pleasure and completion. She was radiant, thinking of the gown she would wear, the music and Allen, all in an unanalyzed tangle of excitement.

Sylvus smiled in good humor. "Yes, yes, you little butterfly. Has Antonin gone?"

"Long ago. Good-by, Richard. Is n't Mr. Dietrich nice?"

"He seems all right," said Richard. "But why in the name of everything did you bring that Mitchell woman here?"

"That's very ungrateful of you. I brought her just for an old order for you. Besides, she's really a dear when you know her."

"Yes, she must be," said Richard dryly.

"Nona darling," whispered Sylvus as they went out together, "you'll enjoy it to-night, won't you? And you *do* understand my not going."

"Yes, indeed," said Nona brightly. "You'd be bored anyway."

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"I might have been, dear. And I'm not a Puccini enthusiast."

"Oh, but I am. He's *human*, Sylvus. And you know it's divine to be human."

He smiled tenderly. "Then you're human, little Nona."

"Yes, I'm human, very, very human, Sylvus. I wonder if Mr. Dietrich's human." She spoke in spite of herself, although she would have preferred not to have mentioned him. . . . It annoyed her to think that she had brought him forward again.

"Why, what makes you speak of *him*, dearest?"

"I don't know." She pressed Sylvus's arm affectionately and was silent the rest of the way home.

CHAPTER V.

IT seemed to Nona sometimes as if, by living swiftly, she were only obeying an instinctive law of equilibrium, so fleet was the passage of days. And when came a moment of leisure or thought, there was always Sylvus beside her, unhurried, serene, to reassure and give comfortable sense of poise, never proving an interference to her willing flight through certain frivolous hours, but rather showing gratitude to any diversion which found favor in her restless spirit. His own days were tranquil and contented, never idle. He had chosen to spend this winter in New York in spite of the tempting suggestions of an impresario. "Later, later," he had said. "Later when my concerto is finished, I shall tour again. There is plenty of time." Nona agreed and approved, eager for the settled months in a city which she loved. New York was a bottomless cup, from which she might drink her fill. Here her youth set swinging amused itself joyously; here was an amiable place for her social tendencies; here a rôle to play, as Sylvus's wife. Sylvus was doing well. His concerto would

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be musically important, a Berceuse, and Humoresque and Sonata in the working, promised delightfully. There were a few concerts to be given during the season, and some chamber-music with Petroff and Santini, a young Italian cellist.

Nona often marveled at her husband's complete absorption in his elected world. He seemed to live in a perpetual trance of musical concentration. All that was dearest to him — herself paramount — became translated into ecstatic harmony. There was Richard Worden, who stood in his affection next her; there were the books and vases, each in their place, expressions to be melodized. It was as if he were always playing his soul forth in tribute of some one or something loved. The heavy surge of city life, the volume and brutality of its projected force, had no disturbing influence upon his work or mood. To her, on the contrary, it proved a source of mystery and fever; it pushed her forward, trembling with vague expectancies. She loved the sense of crowds in the streets, the complicated tangle of men and women rushing apparently without purpose or system in every direction, the deafening orchestration of bells, whistles, motor horns and rattle of passing vehicles, the incessant toil and bustle of millions of strangers; she loved the pitiless giants of stone and iron, dwarfing those who had dared to conceive them, the little busy people, victims of their

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own colossal schemes, shadowed by the creations of their brains. Added to this, there was the excitement of claiming friends, ceaseless pursuit of some pleasant or disagreeable sensation to be found in a play, an opera, a picture — the thousand and one brilliant toys of seeking imaginations.

“I go where you all go,” she said to Allen Dietrich one day. “I hunt what you all hunt. I’m one of you.”

“Who are we and what do we hunt?” he asked.

“You . . . why, You of To-day, the great Curious Ones. And what you hunt? The un-seizable, the electric, the mortal in God, not the God in mortal,” she answered and smiled at him, as she only smiled when she was most restless of mind.

Allen Dietrich often found his way to her these days, less at first through any conscious arrangement between them, than by plausible circumstance or naturally formed occasions suggested, when, at the houses of mutual friends, they met and talked together.

He was like no other man she had ever known — a self-confessed dilettante, appreciative of women, but elusive with them, too fastidious to be indiscriminate and in a secret corner of soul, she suspected, a very lonely man. This in itself was enough to awaken the interest of that mysterious maternal instinct which takes so many forms of ex-

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pression in women like Nona. There was pride, too, in the thought that it was she who had brought Worden into his life. For the two men had become at once friends, and Allen had already commenced in a business-like way to study the question of American art. She felt accordingly that she was directing in some fashion, his destiny, and worked the more to advise, inspire and interest. It was for Worden's sake as well, she told herself. Allen was a valuable ally.

In this friendship Sylvus took small part. He saw Allen but rarely, preferring his own gentle background of retirement, work and dreams. Nona knew that he would rather be left alone when she or Richard could not be with him. Indeed he demanded so little of her, that it became gradually natural for her to be less with him. And so it came about that often in the afternoons at tea-time he was alone, waiting for her.

One of these afternoons, about two weeks after the tea in Worden's studio, Sylvus sat in the big, brown room with its subtle perfume of incense always reminiscent of Nona, and waited as usual for her to come home. He had called Antonin into the room to be with him as company. Antonin busily dusted the vases with one of Nona's discarded soft scarfs.

"Be careful," said Sylvus anxiously. "If you

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must dust the vases, don't let any of them drop."

"Monsieur should not have fear," reassured the old man. "Never would I drop one — never."

"You did once,—a bit of good Sèvres. And it was in dusting, do you remember?"

"Monsieur recalls that unhappy affair? I did not break the little vase. It broke itself quite alone."

"You were dusting," insisted Sylvus gently.

"It is one of the mysteries," said Antonin, and went to turn higher the lamp. "I am not of a nervous temperament. I do not imagine untruths. Yet Monsieur, by the Saint Virgin, I swear the vase jumped from my hand to the floor." He sighed and shuffled back to the vases.

"No more suicides then," said Sylvus.

"They must have cost much money, these vases." Antonin disapproved of extravagance.

"They are mostly gifts from kind people who know my weakness. See the little one on the end of the shelf, in shape like a Chianti bottle—you know the Chianti bottle, Antonin. That vase, they tell me, is turquoise glaze. I can feel the glaze. It's Chinese, eighteenth century. A delightful Chinaman gave it to me."

"A Chinaman!" exclaimed Antonin. "Monsieur is then acquainted with Chinamen!"

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"He was a Chinese ambassador and a charming, cultured man. Look at the Wedgwood, Antonin — the fourth, I think, in front. It's blue with white figures. It must seem to be dancing. I always think of them as dancing."

"Yes, Monsieur," Antonin looked bewildered.

Sylvus went on, as if thinking aloud, "They must have such beautiful necks and curves which waltz, and colors bred like flames. I can imagine almond blossoms, chrysanthemums, jonquils springing from them, eternally sun-perfumed; I can hear invisible birds hidden in their shapes. You think I'm mad, Antonin, don't you? But if you knew what they mean to me!"

"Monsieur knows beautiful words," said Antonin, worshipfully. "Will Monsieur not have his tea now? It is late."

Sylvus shook his head. "Not without Madame. Tea is n't worth while when Madame is n't here."

"Madame said she would be back early to-day," said Antonin, aggrieved.

"She's been detained probably. Everybody wishes for Madame," his voice sounded wistful. "She'll be here now at any moment, but she'll surely have had tea. Is the lamp turned low? You know, she does n't like too much light."

"It's turned low enough," grumbled Antonin. "It smells when it's any lower."

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“ Well, I ’ll sit here until she comes,” said Sylvus patiently. His head rested on the leather back of his chair, his hands fell to his sides. Daphnis and Chloe, the two canaries, chirped and scratched at the wires of their cage.

At half past six, Nona came flying, keyed to the world outside. Her entrance into the room was like a shock, a splash to the center of a quiet pool. The air quickened, smelt of cold, violets, and fur. Her cheek, as she laid it in swift caress against Sylvus’s, felt polished and cool as the glaze of a vase. Her impulsive passage up the stairs betrayed itself in heightened color and uneven breathing. Here beside Sylvus now sounded the retreat of her afternoon — laughing voices dying away, tinkle of cups, slam of carriage doors, race through the lamp-lit streets, crush of traffic, scrape of home-tripping feet, frosted lights — all the dissonant bustling notes of a feverish city evening.

Sylvus received her calmly, with a greeting smile and no reproach for the lateness of the hour. She might be sure that his sensitiveness would never mar her home-coming. But she found herself like a person running at full speed, stopped by lack of vibrant air. The line of the race seemed broken. Sylvus, the soft moon-glow of the lamp, the domestic crackle of the fire, chirp of canaries, opposed her mood, touched it with cool ascetic fingers.

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She could almost hear the whir and jangle of her nerves slowing down, as she answered Sylvus's interested questions. She strove unconsciously by amusing him with the remnants of her animation to keep up the spirited standard of the afternoon.

Mrs. Mitchell, obsessed by a mania for entertainment, was giving a series of musical teas. Weary of bridge, she wished to encourage a more artistic form of social reunion, and having read somewhere that at French teas, the guests sang, played or recited for their common instruction and diversion, she was now working to persuade her friends to develop talents. Better to encourage them she was planning a Diction Club.

"She wants to help Richard among other things," chattered Nona. "It seems that Mr. Dietrich has been talking a great deal about Richard, and poor Richard is in danger of becoming the fashion. Dorothy Mitchell announced to-day that she was a disciple of American art in society. Why, Sylvus," she perched — hat, furs, gloves and all — on the arm of his chair, "this Diction Club she's going to get up will be screamingly funny. We're all of us to take lessons from that young Frenchman, Monsieur de Marny, who's over here lecturing on Famous Courtesans. She says that if the American Society woman was more intellectual she could do a great deal for art. Is n't that a joke?"

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"And how is Monsieur de Marny's diction club going to help young art?"

"That's the joke, you poor dear. It is n't! Mr. Dietrich was there and he and I could hardly keep our faces straight."

"Oh, I see," said Sylvus, gently. "It does seem a pity, Nona dear, does n't it?" He stroked her long fur stole. "It does seem a pity to waste so much time, does n't it? How sweet you smell! Is n't it violets?"

"Yes," said Nona. She unpinned a big bunch of them from her coat and pressed them to his nose. "They were given me. But you know I don't like violets, Sylvus."

"I know," he agreed sympathetically; "and yet they smell so sweetly."

She rose from the arm of his chair with one of her sudden impulses of motion, threw aside her furs and coat and commenced unbuttoning her long gloves. "I don't like them anyway. They're always given me on occasions, usually when I'm going away. They're the regular conventional good-by flower."

"But these were n't, were they, Nona?" His question was all innocence, but it dimly irritated her.

"No," she answered rather shortly. "Did I say *always*? It's another one of my exaggerations."

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"I never thought of them as meaning anything in particular," continued Sylvus, not noticing her momentary sharpness. "But I'll never give you any more then, Nona."

"That's right, dear, don't," she said, taking off her hat and patting her hair. "What's on this evening?"

"Petroff and Santini are coming to play with me. Do you mind?"

"No, no, indeed. But I'll get into a tea gown then before dinner." She gathered her wraps in her arms and was gone.

At dinner she talked very little. The clock ticking exasperated her and she told Antonin to carry it out of the room. "I can't bear monotony to-night," she said. "Don't play Beethoven, Sylvus, for Heaven's sake."

He looked hurt. "Of course I won't, Nona darling. But I wish you would n't talk like that."

"Oh, I'm sorry I was cross. I don't know what's the matter with me," she cried, quick to repent the nerves, vented upon his gentleness. The afternoon hummed its last refrain in her mind. She could not help comparing its vivacity to the quiet of her present surroundings.

"It's so hard to stop when you start," she said suddenly after a long silence.

"Stop what, dear?"

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“ Oh — going ! ” she said vaguely.

Dietrich had walked home with her. She had been on the point of asking him in to dinner, but had told him instead that she might be home that evening. Sylvus usually went to bed early, before Antonin, who slept out, left the apartment, so that the old man could valet him. But she could not rest so early and she dreaded wide-awake companionless hours near the fire. Dietrich was the only man of all her acquaintance whom she could imagine sharing these hours. The thought of Sylvus did not occur to her. She would not ask him to stay up with her, and he was far removed from many interests of her outside world. In other words, when she was nervous, Sylvus was not the type of man to calm her. He could not talk the jargon of her nerves, he could not understand. She dabbled with her food and Antonin remarked the fact.

“ Is not the little chicken to Madame’s taste ? ”

“ Is n’t she eating well, Antonin ? ” asked Sylvus anxiously.

“ Of course I am, Sylvus. Only I ’m not hungry. I stuffed cakes at the tea,” she said impatiently.

After dinner, she wandered, restless, not knowing quite what to do with herself. It seemed to her as if the dinner had been served earlier than usual.

“ Recite to me, dear,” begged Sylvus. It was

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one of his greatest joys, this gift of hers, and one which she most often hastened to satisfy. But to-night the inspiration lacked. "What shall it be?" she said unenthusiastically.

"Something in French, dearest." He was at once all eagerness and anticipation. "Something by that wonderful young poet, Albert Samain. I love his things."

Suddenly she leaped to her feet, draperies swaying. The room became a stage, her eyes grew large and bright. She began:

*"Lentement, doucement de peur qu'elle se brise
Prendre une âme, écouter ses plus secrets aveux
En silence, comme on caresse des cheveux."*

Her voice sank low, persuasive. She turned towards Sylvus as to an audience. He sat, rapt of profile, eyes closed.

*"Dans l'ombre un soir d'orage, où la chair s'électrise
Promener ses doigts d'or sur le clavier nerveux . . ."*

She would have compelled his sight, compelled tribute to the thrill of dreams in her voice. But Sylvus's very worshiping immobility seemed unalive, remote. Her voice sagged listlessly, she sank into a chair and ended on a singsong note.

*"Et dans l'âme que gonfle un immense soupir
Laisser en s'en allant, comme le souvenir
D'un grand cygne de neige aux longues, longues plumes."*

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There was silence. She stared into the fire and listened to the ticking of the clock.

"A swan of snow with long, long feathers," murmured Sylvus, "with long, long feathers. . . . Oh, Nona, how beautiful!"

Just then the bell rang and she jumped to her feet. "Yes, it's beautiful," she said. "But here come your friends, Sylvus. Now we will have music."

CHAPTER VI

PETROFF entered the room sleekly, rubbing his tiny hands as if to coax life into them. Santini, the Italian, *svelte* and quick to smile, followed with his cello. Both men were in evening dress; Santini's of smarter cut. Nona welcomed them cordially. That evening it seemed as if even the Polish pianist were a relief, and Santini had always amused her. There was a quality of velvet in his face, a soft, dark warmth, lit by the flash of his teeth. He was of ardent Italian blood, young and lyrical, more harmless than he looked and less harmless than he sounded. With his manner of a naïve child, he had conquered poverty in New York, and now found himself the fashion and a success. Women mothered him, men liked him, and he smiled equally upon the world of both.

Petroff stared at Nona impassively. "I came to-night for you," he whispered. She looked over and around but not at him.

"You need not have come then," she said and moved away.

There was talk and scraping of chairs near the

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piano. Sylvus, violin in hand, tried already his his bow upon the open strings.

"Oh, Sylvus, why are you in such a hurry?" said Nona. "Can't poor Santini smoke a cigarette?"

"Yes, yes, certainly, dear." Sylvus put down his violin at once.

"I did n't mean to hurry. Petroff, you smoke too." He walked slowly back to his big chair.

She offered Santini a cigarette. "Here's the wherewithal, a Trecentisimi. I've been made a present of some."

"You are very good. Thank you very much." He spoke rapidly in exceptional English with Southern cadence. "I am in love again," he went on smiling, and his eyes rolled fervently beneath his black eyebrows.

"Whom with?" asked Nona, all at once feeling in a good temper and thoroughly amused.

"She is young, so very young, and she is . . . do you say plump?" he flourished his arms. "There is something of her. She is not pale and cold. She has blue eyes. I shall marry her some day."

"You'll never marry," laughed Nona.

"I shall marry her some day," insisted Santini. "But she is poor and so am I. What is to be done?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I have not slept nor eaten for a week."

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“How long have you known her?”

“I have seen her once after the opera. Is that not enough? You smile, Madame? No, do not smile. I am mad with love.” He looked at her trustingly like a child and stroked his curly black mustache.

“Santini’s in love, Sylvus,” called out Nona.

Sylvus was talking in a low voice to Petroff, who took opportunity at the interruption to stroll languidly over to her. “In love? Ah, so are we all,” he said.

“Good for you, Santini,” cried Sylvus heartily.

“How strange,” murmured Petroff.

“What’s strange?” said Nona sharply. Petroff seemed to creep behind her, to insinuate his voice below all other sounds.

“Some day you will love —”

“Really, Monsieur —” she began indignantly.

He raised a tiny finger and laid it across his lips. “Hush! Do not speak. It will not be with me. But remember, some day you will love as you alone can love.”

He was gone before she could answer, and now at the piano, struck a few weird chords. Sylvus rose eagerly.

“My violin, Nona dear, on the piano. I think we can begin, don’t you?”

Santini, softly humming an Italian air, went to

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his cello. In a moment he was bending over it, head forward, see-sawing his bow on the tuning notes.

"You must have more light," said Nona. She wanted them to play now. She no longer wished to talk. "The matches are near you, Monsieur Petroff. Light the big candle."

The room swam in soft, jonquil haze, fusing lamp, candle and fire with the cigarette smoke. The instruments, mellowed to autumn tints, looked like enormous leaves.

With an involuntary glance at the clock, she went to the divan and settled back with a sigh.

Then the music, like three silver birds, hovered and flew, sensuous through the hush of amber smoke and violet shadows.

Nona closed her eyes and felt for the faded violets at her breast. It seemed to her as if the music were hiding her, pressing her down to the bottom of a thought. She wanted suddenly to be good, very good. A nerve which ached, rose to her throat and made her sad with its pain. She could not see why she should condemn herself as bad, and yet in dreary luxury the thought was there. She shook it away. All women were the same in their joy and hunger of life. Indeed she was better than many. She made her husband happy. She had given up everything for him. The nerve in her

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throat beat more slowly, her head felt hot. Sylvus was happy. Yes, but was n't she? Petroff's words stole to mind. "Some day you will love." She hated Petroff for those words. She loved now — she loved Sylvus. That was the beginning and end of it. For the rest, she was a woman of moods. What Sylvus gave her was what she needed — the love of his soul and music.

She moved restlessly on the divan and looked toward the three men who played. They appeared to her worlds away, seen through the wrong end of a microscope. She was forgotten by them. They bent fervently over their instruments. There came to her a sense of injustice and loneliness. Why was she forgotten, left to the blackness of a mood? The music itself depressed her. Its hurt was thin and sharp; it pierced hidden nerves, opened tiny wounds. She should n't hear so much music. It troubled sleeping things.

If she had not been alone to-night, the formless things might have slept on. If Allen Dietrich, for instance, had come to dinner! It was useless to be alone. Allen should have come, and yet there had been a slight restraint in his manner of leaving her, and that was the real reason why she had not asked him. He had looked at her almost sternly as if she were a naughty child. Perhaps he felt too that she was bad, secretly bad, and despised her for it.

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Still he seemed to like being with her, though it was she who made the most effort to be with him. Men had always run after her, even when she married Sylvus. Marriage need not surely prevent friendship with men. This was the modern age of freedom and individuality for women. But Allen Dietrich stood just a trifle aloof from the easy relationship which she would have established with him. It tantalized her. Once or twice she had teased him about his conservatism, his fastidious attitude towards intimacies, and there had come into his eyes a look which frightened her. "Now you know why," he had said coolly. The arrogance of the crouching masculine beast beneath the exquisite nicety of his poise and courtesy had been a revelation over which she shivered alternate indignation and secret pleasure. The memory of this look, carefully ignored in after-talks with him, apparently forgotten, was one reason why she condemned herself to-night. All the same she glanced frequently to the clock.

It was late. Sylvus and Santini played on, oblivious of her, but it seemed as if Petroff watched. His eyes often slid smooth stares to where she lay.

The bell rang—it rang like a sequence to her mood, as if she herself had rung it, punctuating only for an instant the music, and was drowned. For the three played on.

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She raised herself on an elbow and listened acutely. Commonplace sounds drifted to the room, Antonin's shuffle, a door opening, the murmur of voices, another door opening.

It did not occur to her as a surprise when Dietrich walked in. He came quietly, with a wave of his hand to Petroff, which sent the music on its uninterrupted way. She put out her hand and he touched it. Then he sank into the big chair near her, his back to the musicians. Like a child, she settled again into the hollow of the cushions.

"I'm glad you came," she said. She became all at once more tremulous and vividly aware than ever of the music, which flowed suave and limpid, forming as it were, a deep pool, into which she and Allen sank from sight.

They would never grow tired of playing. Only a word now and then—"Repeat the adagio."—"Again that last passage."—"Bravo, Maître!"

But Petroff, from the piano, stared across the shadows to a big mirror, which reflected dimly unreal Nona and Allen. And as his skilful fingers, unneedful of his attention, ran the keys of melody, his eyes of glassy surface became smaller mirrors, his mouth curled to a faint smile. With the wan violin notes, the choke of the cello, he seemed to weave transparent nets, to cast them across the room. Beneath the glisten of his strange eyes there was a

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spinning wheel, fed by the mirror. He played on, embroidering sensuous chords, circling the fellow instruments, stealing soul and shaping it insidiously. And always he smiled, leaning his head back, glancing through sudden, half-closed lids, sprawling on his chair, his short arms and hands working at the tangle of harmony. It was as if he gave the music especial meaning, colored it from lightest shades to rich mysterious tones of purple, as if he keyed it to a thin, keen, dagger point, or coiled it subtly into a noose to be thrown in slender rings across the room.

Allen had moved slightly. He did not look at Nona. She could only see the line of his head and shoulders. It was a strong line, which withstood the wavering haze of smoke, asserted a claim of unchanging, impregnable masculinity in the dream world of sensuous music. The three figures of the musicians fused to blurs — Petroff livid and smiling; Sylvus swaying gaunt and inspired, with closed eyes; Santini ardent. She herself retreated mistily to the background. Allen alone, firmly correct in outline, but with face hidden — Allen alone embodied something tangible, something controlled, something almost brutal in control.

“Allen,” she whispered. She had never before called him by his first name. But she wished all at once to see his eyes. “Allen!” It was a command. Then he turned.

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Petroff smiled on as if well pleased. But the music grew slower, Sylvus's face shone pale from the shadows. He was tired. "I think we must stop," he said in a low, far-away voice.

The last chords rippled obediently, spreading into space — the quickened finale tripped to its end. There was a silence — then the slight wooden noise of instruments laid aside, scrape of chairs. Santini came quickly forward. He knew Allen well.

"Mr. Dietrich's here, dear," said Nona, leaving the divan hastily. Her cheeks were flushed. She put her hands up to her hair.

"Oh, Mr. Dietrich," Sylvus's voice sounded very weary but cordial. "Good evening. I hope we have n't given you too much music." He offered his hand confidently into space.

Nona looked at Allen curiously, as if she saw him for the first time. She was, in a vague, unexplained way, relieved, when not prolonging the hand clasp, he answered formally.

Then she was aware of Petroff close to her. "Your husband's music, Madame," he murmured, "your husband's music is so beautiful that it makes one dream of love."

She raised her eyebrows impatiently and moved away, but his smile followed her. It followed her for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER VII

THERE is a nameless reason or force, which drives many women forward into unknown adventure — a force so elusive and subtle that even with a rapid wheel-about in attempt to sight the criminal wind, there seems to be nothing to be felt or seen but inoffensive, startled reflections of Self, surprised by a suspicion of instinct. Motivity, especially feminine motivity, is a stealthy and mysterious affair.

Nona did not quite know what was happening to her, nor why she pursued so wildly states of complication and obscurity. But, as if compelled by mischievous counselors, she floundered in a fine confusion of mind and imagination. Whether it was she who was fleeing or she who was chasing an illogical will-o'-the-wisp, the result was the same, a vague, fevered discontent, which seemed forever changing its direction; causing her, one moment, to fling herself at Sylvus in transports of demonstrative resolutions; the next, to be off at furious pace in search of pleasure and amusement elsewhere.

Very little time had passed since the evening when

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Petroff from the piano had watched and smiled; when his music had played strange havoc with her mood; but in that little time each moment counted heavily. Try as she might to deceive herself, that evening had revealed other worlds in which Sylvus held no place. Nor could she drag him to a consciousness of change, unless she blurted out an actual confession of it, and there was nothing definite to confess.

Her accentuated restlessness might have betrayed her to any one more observant than Sylvus. She could not stay quiet. Her hands fluttered continually at unimportant tasks, her mind buzzed and flew as pointlessly as the flights of certain whirring insects, she became ardent or cold, active or depressed in the flick of an instant. But it was impossible for Sylvus to remark upon a condition which translated itself mainly in exaggerated gesture.

Moreover in this phase, hungering womanlike for sympathy and understanding, Allen Dietrich, who stood at the dim starting point of uncontrol and trouble, seemed best able to influence and appreciate her problem, if problem there was. It was all so vague that she herself hardly knew what had happened. She longed to be with him, to throw, as it were, responsibility for her nerves upon his strength. But Allen's attitude also had changed. He seemed to be trying to see as little of her as pos-

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sible. Finally he stayed away for a week. Then she telephoned and at her request he met her the next day for tea.

Once settled at a table in a discreet corner of the Café Lafayette, and minor questions settled, such as tea and toast, he leaned deliberately back in his chair and looked at her with eyes a shade insolent.

"I'm forty," he said. "I'm forty, and I'm in danger of being made a fool of. I don't know whether I care about it or not."

"What do you mean?" she cried, at once alert.

"My dear young lady, can you tell me then, where we're going to? You're much too intelligent a woman not to realize that we're not standing still."

"Why, we're not going anywhere in particular. How stupid of you!" she answered. At that moment the entire situation, and she had never before even called it a situation, seemed simple. She was quieter that afternoon. Her smile was clear and candid.

He stared at her reflectively.

"I see — but then, why go anywhere?" She leaned her elbows on the table. A sense of power nourished all the little gaping crevices of femininity in her soul. She liked him to challenge her. "You and I are friends. Is n't that a great deal?" She braved his eyes which were keen and apprais-

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ing. He stroked his mustache, but said nothing. She noticed the seal ring, heavy and bold, on his little finger. "We've grown to know each other so quickly and I need you for a friend. We'll always understand one another, won't we?"

"You foolish little girl. It's a devilish dangerous thing, I warn you."

She looked at him. "Don't let's talk of danger. Only I'm often lonely and I *feel* you understand."

"I'm sorry then, because there's a chance that I may have to go away for a time," he said gravely.

"Away!"

He nodded, playing with his ring. "If I do, it will be you I'll have to thank."

"I don't understand," she said anxiously, and watched his hand which fascinated her.

"Worden and I lunched together the other day. I'm surprised at myself for being so interested in the man. But ever since you spoke of him —"

"Well —" she leaned forward, her forehead wrinkled, her fingers tapping the table.

"He made me a proposition," said Allen slowly. "There's probably nothing in it, but I'm in a gambling mood. Your friend's a sublime fanatic, my dear Mrs. Leete."

"Call me Nona. You always do."

"Dear Nona, then. He's nothing to win or lose

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and if it comes down to it, neither have I. And he's got ideas in his head that appeal to me."

"What are they?"

"He's willing to turn over all the money he's got in the world, if I'll chip in what I can, and if I can manage to interest a few men I know in the affair, so as to have a working capital. With the money — let's say \$50,000 at least — this astonishing friend of yours —"

"Of Sylvus's," she interrupted coldly.

"Don't forget, it was through you I met him. Anyway, he proposes to found in one of the central Western states an Art College, small at first, as our means may not be extensive, but which he hopes will grow. He himself will direct the course in sculpture and he wants me to be business manager. There would be only Americans admitted — painters, sculptors, architects, musicians. Later we should have a scholarship. In any case the expense to the students would be very small. We'd encourage original work, launch our young graduates and protect them with the understanding that they'd stay in their own country for inspiration."

"But that was n't Worden's idea at *all*!" cried Nona. "He wanted his College to belong to the Government."

"Things move slowly," said Allen. "Worden could hand over the enterprise later, so he thinks,

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if the Government would take it. But it's no money-making game, and I doubt if the nation, for some time anyway, would stand the expense. The men who go into it must be disinterested. There *are* a few dreamers, hidden among our millionaires, if they're approached right. I charge myself to find one or two."

"I don't think it will work at all," said Nona. Her cheeks had grown flushed, she moved restlessly in her chair. "When — when would you go?"

"Pretty soon. Worden wants me to see the lay of the land, and find out real-estate values in the different states, and make inquiries as to Western opinion on such a proposition."

"If it went through would you always live out there?"

Allen smiled a trifle wearily. "'Always' is a long word. I dare say I could go or stay as I chose. I've no ties, you know."

"I —" began Nona and stopped short. "I think Worden's absurd."

"You surprise me."

"The idea of sending you off that way. Why he hardly knows you! Why doesn't he go himself?"

"He has work — I, none." He spoke to her soothingly as if to a child. "Besides, I'll be glad for many reasons to leave New York. It's no

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place to live. You won't stay on here yourself for long. Your husband will be off before you know it with some touring work."

"I *like* New York, and I can't bear to think of leaving it. Sylvus won't go until spring anyway."

She felt unreasonably angry at Richard Worden, as if he were trying to steal a friend from her; as if, in fact, he were sending Allen Dietrich away on purpose. Men never could leave things as they were. They must always be busy with new ideas, changing comfortable existing combinations to suit themselves. She was content with the situation between herself and Allen, and now Richard interfered, and the only man with whom she really liked to be, in New York, was talking of leaving.

"I'm wise to go."

"Nonsense," she retorted sharply.

Neither of them spoke for a while. Then she glanced at the big clock on the wall. "Oh, dear — it's seven already. Sylvus will be waiting. We must hurry."

Allen called the waiter. She sat silent while he settled the bill. Still silent, she allowed him to help her on with her coat. When they found themselves outside in the cool, evening air, walking swiftly along the street homeward, she slipped her hand through his arm.

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"I'm sorry I was cross."

He pressed the hand. "You're a strange little creature."

She glanced up at him, her eyes shining.

"Don't look at me that way, you witch."

"I'm not responsible for the way I look at people," she said.

"I believe you're not."

"Oh dear, this clock says quarter past seven."

She quickened her steps, it was really late. Sylvus must have been waiting since six o'clock.

"Let's take a cab."

"No, I love walking so. Besides, we're nearly there." She told herself that Sylvus would have to wait, and she tried to imagine that he did not mind her getting home so late; if he did, surely he would show more signs of impatience, and his greeting smile was never reproachful enough to make her feel guilty.

When at last they reached the corner, where the old house stood, she lingered perceptibly.

"I advise you to think twice before you go off on any wild scheme of Worden's," she said.

"Don't forget you interested me in it yourself, little lady. And you were wise — wiser than I have ever been." He smiled, looking down at her. She repressed a strong movement of impatience.

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"I did n't realize you would take it seriously. Besides —" she hesitated. "I'm selfish. I like you to be here."

Even while she spoke she sent a rapid glance up to the windows of the apartment. Lights shone behind the curtains. She held out her hand suddenly.

"Good-by. I'll telephone. Don't go to-morrow anyway."

Now she was beside the front door. It was time to go in, but she felt no longer in a hurry. The mere fact that she was, so to speak, home already, eased her conscience. The evening settled cool, dark shadows on the pavements. The sky seemed very near to the roofs, and profoundly still, with little, snapping stars here and there, like frozen electric sparks. The hum of city voices sounded agreeably to her venturesome spirit. It seemed a pity to leave it all.

"I wish I were going out again," she said.

"Why don't you?"

"Sylvus would rather stay at home. What are *you* going to do?"

He consulted his watch thoughtfully. "I'll dine at the club and perhaps stroll in for an act of some good play."

Suddenly she envied him his freedom.

"You'll catch cold standing so long. It's your

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dinner time," he reminded her. "I'm sorry you and I can't go off together. Unfortunately you have a husband."

"It *would* be nice," she admitted with a sigh, "but, as you say, I have a husband. Good night. Thank you for reminding me of the time. Amuse yourself."

"I'll try to. Good night, Nona."

She left him quickly. The steam heat in the hall gave stifling warmth. It sent the blood pounding to her head, and her furs became intolerable burdens. She had hardly fitted her key into the lock, when Antonin opened the door. She brushed by him in her usual whirlwind passage to the sitting-room, where she expected to find Sylvus waiting.

"Oh, I'm sorry I'm late," she began, and stopped short. Sylvus was not there. "Why, where—" she turned toward the door. Antonin stepped softly into the room, a shapeless gloved finger to his lips. Through the portières she could see the table set and ready for dinner, the candles lighted.

"Where is Monsieur?"

Antonin came closer to her. "Monsieur has the *nérralgie*. He has suffer, so I have put him to bed, and he sleeps. He did not wish to sleep, before Madame should arrive but it is *malgré lui*."

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"Oh, dear," she exclaimed. "How long has he slept?"

"One half an hour." He pointed to the clock. "Madame comes late."

There was reproach in his manner to-night, something almost accusing.

"I could n't help it," she retorted crossly. "It's too early anyway to dine at half past seven. Every one else dines at eight. I suppose I'll have to have dinner alone now. I wish I'd known." She threw her furs on the divan. Old Antonin methodically picked them up and took them out into the hall.

She was sorry Sylvus had a headache, but it was hard to come home and have nothing to do, no one to talk to. She was not an inventively active woman and preferred things to be ready for her, throwing herself with most ardor into the necessities for action represented by other people's suggestions. Of her own initiative she could not remain content long doing one thing. It seemed to her this evening as if she could not stay alone, dependent upon her own resources. Her body and mind pulsed still in tune to the outer world and its distractions.

"Did he take a powder?" she asked, frowning at herself in the mirror as she slowly removed her hat and veil.

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"*Oui, Madame.*" Antonin had returned from the hall and was fussing with the lamp, apparently reluctant to leave the room.

If he had taken a powder, she thought, he would sleep on for the rest of the night. The idea of an evening alone, stretched a flat, unappealing prospect before her. She refused to envisage it. Without reasoning or thinking further, she left the old servant just as he seemed about to speak to her, and went out into the hall where with great caution she rang the telephone. After the faintest hesitation, announced by central's questioning "Hello!" she gave the number of Allen Dietrich's club, and before she knew it, she was asking for him. "Not there? Tell him to ring up Mrs. Leete as soon as he arrives."

She hung up the receiver slowly. Now she regretted having given her name and wished she had left matters as they were. After all it was imprudent to have telephoned. She was vexed at the impulse which at first had been unconscious, but once obeyed appeared undignified and exaggerated and she hesitated, her hand hovering over the instrument, half decided to ring again and countermand the message.

After all, he might not dine at the Players; he belonged to several other clubs. She would leave it to chance and even if he *did* call her up, she

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would not follow her original plan of asking him to call that evening. Now that she had done her best not to be alone, she desired above all things quiet and solitude, remembering that there were letters to write and a book with uncut pages awaiting leisure moments.

Antonin was still in the brown room. She looked at him with some surprise. "Why don't you get my dinner? I'm starving," she said. The old man came near to her, his back bent by the ravages of age and rheumatism. He pulled with one hand at the ill-fitting gloved fingers of the other. There were tears in his filmed-over eyes.

"Madame," he whispered huskily, "it must be that I speak what is in my heart."

"Is there anything wrong with you?" she asked kindly.

"I have watched the little Madame grow," he said. "I have been so proud to be in her service, to work for her, and I have love Monsieur."

"Well — ?"

"Now I am not happy, Madame. Things go not as they should." His old face grimaced pitifully; he glanced at her with appeal and sadness. "Madame has no longer a mother to tell her truths. Her friends are not as they should be."

"Antonin!" Her voice was sharp and peremptory.

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But he shook his head and would not be silenced. "Madame is young. She loves pleasure. She is always away these days — always with Messieurs about her. It is not so a wife must be. It is a wife's place near her dear husband. I lie awake at night and weep for Monsieur. Ah, Madame, *vous avez tort. Ce n' est pas bien ce que vous faites là.*"

"Antonin, how dare you! If you speak again like that to me, you 'll have to leave," said Nona.

The old man still shook his head sadly. "And who would care then for Monsieur? No, Madame! I have known Madame as a little child so sweet, so beautiful. Oh, listen to me, listen to old Antonin who prays *le bon Dieu* for your good and the happiness of Monsieur —"

She turned and walked to the fireplace, more troubled by Antonin's reproaches than she cared to acknowledge and stood, her head slightly bent forward, her hands clasped behind her back.

Antonin continued in a voice which trembled. "Madame does not know how *triste* to be alone, to be blind, to wait as Monsieur for her coming."

She wheeled about and faced him. "That 's nonsense. You know Monsieur is happy. He always tells me so."

"He does not know, Madame. He is not happy. Some day he will know."

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"He has his music. That is more to him than I," she cried, and stopped short. She need not have explained this.

"It is not well —" croaked Antonin dismally. "I am an old man. I know life as you can not. No good will come of your ways, Madame."

"That 's enough, now," she said. "You 've gone much too far as it is."

Just then the telephone rang. It cut mercilessly through the surrounding quiet, with an energetic, ripping tinkle for attention. Without another look at Antonin, she ran to answer.

"Hello! Did you leave word for me to call you up?" The voice was Allen's as she had known it would be.

"Yes," she said with some constraint. Antonin was listening of course. Instinctively she did not want him to know with whom she was talking. But the exigencies of the telephone allowed for no hesitation. Already at the other end of the wire Allen must be wondering what she had to say.

"Sylvus is in bed with neuralgia," she explained.

"Oh, I 'm sorry."

"I felt lonely. I thought I'd like to talk to some one, so I called you up."

"That was nice of you." The club operator could hear everything that went on over the tele-

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phone. His voice, perhaps for that reason, sounded cold and restrained.

She felt herself awkward and at loss for something to say. "Are you going to the theater?" she went on after a slight silence which he did not attempt to break.

"Why, no. I found a note here from Mrs. Mitchell summoning me for a fourth at bridge. I've just telephoned acceptance."

She wanted to get away from the telephone now. It had been very foolish of her to ring him up. "Oh — you'll be in a hurry then. I won't keep you. Good night."

"Wait a moment. Don't be so quick." Now his voice grew warmer. "It's too bad you're alone. Why don't you come over to Mrs. Mitchell's?"

"I'm not invited."

"That does n't matter."

"I don't go where I'm not asked." It was her turn to sound formal and cold.

"I'm sorry. I would have come around for you. Call me up soon again, won't you?"

"You'll be busy arranging for your trip."

"Not too busy."

"Oh, all right I will. Good night." She hung up the receiver and went back to the fire. Antonin had disappeared. He was no doubt at last arranging her dinner.

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Dorothy Mitchell might have asked her for bridge. She felt forlorn and abused. No one really cared what became of her. Sylvus slept, Antonin scolded, and the rest had their own lives to live — even Dietrich. He had been almost rude to her at first over the telephone. She stared in the mirror. Her eyes had assumed a plaintive, mournful expression, the corners of her mouth curved downwards, her hair was mussed. She was pathetic looking.

Then all at once a sense of how ridiculous she was in this mood came to her rescue. She flung back her head and laughed.

“The dinner of Madame is served,” announced Antonin from the doorway. He stood grave and reserved again, with lowered eyes.

She was hungry. The solid material joy of eating when one is hungry has its advantages over more intangible woes.

She took up the new book and walked slowly into the dining-room. Antonin had removed Sylvus's place, but the round table did not seem too large for one. The candles gave restful shine, jonquils in a bowl smelt sweetly, and the dinner looked appetizing. She sat down almost cheerfully to her soup, cold meat and salad, fruit and cheese, and a well-filled carafe of Burgundy. The soft red wine lazed in

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her head, gave her sensations of warmth and content. Nothing seemed important, except herself alone, unbothered, free to eat, drink, read, smoke and later, sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THREE weeks passed and still Allen Dietrich lingered on in New York. It is true that there was always good and logical excuse for this delay. One week he had hopes of interesting a very wealthy friend of his in the subscription for the Art College; the next it was business of his own which demanded personal attention; the next he was waiting for a man who had promised to take him West in a private car. But in the meanwhile, he and Nona were together much of the time.

Nona was triumphant. Her relationship with Allen Dietrich continued deceptively platonic, a relationship untroubling to her conscience, satisfying to her restless love of adventure. She appropriated more and more of his time. His departure became an elastic prospect stretched indefinitely forward into a future where his going would not annoy her. She lived now from day to day, planning her hours, as only a woman can, in such manner as to include Sylvus and Allen, each in the turn of his particular need for her or hers for him. It was easier, for instance, to be charming and tender with

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Sylvus, when the thought of Allen lingered in reserve for another mood, and it was amusing to relax in Allen's company when she felt Sylvus as an unreproachful safeguard.

But unfortunately in the plot of things, one or even two people content with a situation do not necessarily keep it stationary. There is a tacit law of perpetual complication owing to lack of complicity and co-ordination among the chief players in comedy. The unexpected, that lurking monster around the corner, introduces circumstances, or a villain, or even well-meaning friends, and consequences therefrom spring up like forgotten characters in the play to jumble and reshape the plan of it. So, now and again, Petroff's mask shadowed Nona's peace of mind.

Petroff had a silent, sly-footed way of hovering at the back of things, of appearing when she least desired to see him. He was often at the Café Lafayette, which was most annoying, especially when she went there to tea with Allen; he was also often driving up or down Fifth Avenue when she and Allen were walking home late afternoons. She began to wonder if it were really accident which brought about such frequent indiscreet meetings. He might have been prying and yet she could accuse him of nothing deliberate, for at all times he only lifted his hat, smiled and passed on as an

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acquaintance would have done, and apparently nothing came of it.

But Petroff was perhaps more dangerous than she realized. Innuendo and intrigue were the talents, after music, at which he excelled, and to this, with no apparent interest or effort, he gave much of his spare time, although nothing was ever traced back to him, and he himself would have denied acquaintance with malice. He would have betrayed his best friend for the pleasure of a word nicely supplied at the right moment. Nona was not even a friend, still less to be spared, since she had chosen another man with whom to deceive her husband. Petroff believed as a starting point that all women deceived their husbands, and as a matter of fact saw no reason why they should not.

Therefore, one day, finding himself alone with Richard Worden, both waiting for Sylvus to come home, both comfortably settled in the brown room before the fire, Worden taciturn in his dislike of the foreigner, there was no delicacy to be considered in mentioning Nona's name, nor while mentioning it, in neglecting Dietrich's. His manner of accomplishing this master suggestion to the honest sculptor, was a beautiful bit of subtle work.

But Worden was not subtle and it was an unfortunate moment to insinuate anything about Nona and her affairs. The big sculptor was worried these

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days. A promise to him meant action. He had centered many hopes on Dietrich's interest in the Art College. Dietrich was diplomatic, and he was not; Dietrich knew men whom he, with his bluff uncontrolled Bohemianism, could not approach; Dietrich had no need or business to earn his daily bread while he had to work. The dilettante seemed ideally suited as an executive disciple of the dream nearest Worden's heart. Judging from his own ardor, Worden had expected instant, fanatical devotion to the cause of this American College of Art. But Dietrich was still in New York. It was therefore not a happy moment to mention Nona as a possible explanation.

Richard distrusted Petroff, besides being in no humor for gossip. There were immediate and unpleasant results, where Richard in a fine rage snorted out something about a whipper-snapper and minding one's own business, took his hat and coat without so much as a nod, left the room and house and tramped out, muttering uncomplimentary allusions to insolent worms in the shape of Polish Jews.

It was evidently also an inauspicious occasion for Nona to be bidding Allen Dietrich good-by on the street corner. However, that was what she was doing at the precise moment of Richard's fiery exit from the house, and it was only her proper absorption in Dietrich smiling down upon her, which pre-

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vented either of them noticing the big, red-bearded man, who stood and glowered in their direction and then marched off shaking his head violently.

Richard could not have taken off his hat to them or given them a civil word just then. Meeting them at all seemed a malicious support to Petroff's hints. What would have passed heretofore as insignificant in the big man's unsuspecting mind, did not appear quite so natural or innocent, now that an evil seed of distrust had been sown. Worden was no stupider in his knowledge of the world than most honest men who have chosen bachelorhood as a vocation, but his methods of judging moral questions were far from intricate, consisting usually in avoiding thought of what was not sane and clear as day. He had never liked Nona. She was not the kind of woman with whom he felt comfortable. But he tried to be loyal and fair in his attitude towards her because she was Sylvus's wife.

He did not apply to her conduct Petroff's easy cynicism, nor did he believe her any more guilty than in reality she was, but he condemned her as thoughtless and frivolous. There was something about her presence on the street corner with Allen which offended him. He remembered now that the "fellow," as he irately denominated Dietrich, had been with Nona a good deal of late. As a matter of fact, he should have remarked it before.

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There was something not quite clear in the business.

Not a little troubled by the unwelcome discoveries of his awakened suspicions, he decided to take them and himself to Laura Dunn. He always went to her when something annoyed or perplexed him. She was his friend, the only woman friend he had ever treated as a man, consequently as an equal, and "no love nonsense about it," he was fond of declaring, when twitted and teased on the subject.

Neither Petroff, who still sat in the brown room, smiling contentedly at the mischief he had done, or Nona taking prolonged leave of Allen, could have realized with what heavy heart the good Richard Worden turned his steps towards Laura that afternoon.

Laura possessed the precious talent of always being at home when she was wanted there. Also when Richard's unmistakable ring announced his arrival, he was not left waiting long to fret and fume outside. Laura herself came to the door. His eruption into her tranquil presence to-day was even more violent than usual. He stamped past her and reached the small sitting-room, almost before she had found time to close the door after him.

Although it was cold out of doors, she wore a crisp white linen shirt waist. A leather belt fastened firmly about her waist, revealed a feminine

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trimness of curve, which somehow did not quarrel with the unbending masculine choice of collar.

Her sitting-room was workroom as well. It was lined with books, and choked at one end by an enormous work table, which in its characteristic way suggested a miniature field of tidy battle. No littered frenzies of disheveled inspiration upon it, but perfect discipline of a Liliputian working army, ranked in order from a business-like typewriter, to piles of manuscripts neatly classed, and a not unimportant package of cigarettes, beside a severe, unfrivolous looking ash tray.

Laura came quietly into the room and took at once her favorite chair near the work table. As she sat waiting for Richard to speak first, her profile detached itself against the red window curtain, like a head on a brave new coin. Richard faced her to the other end of the tiny room, blocking the fireplace, the red-covered mantel, the impassive Buddha upon it, the tall square mirror, which reflected Laura's profile. He towered among all these things, and, his hands deep in his pockets, without further ado plunged straight into the reason for his visit. It was easy to talk to Laura; she never interrupted, nor made any of the useless suggestions or remarks so common to some women. He could talk with her as with a man, only there were very few men with whom he would be as confidential.

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Now he poured forth all his complaints of Nona and Dietrich, his contempt for Petroff, his unwilling admission of the proverbial possibility of some fire where there was smoke. He grew very excited while he talked, and swinging fiercely into the small, unimpeded space of floor fell to the pacing of an angry man. "There's some d—n thing I don't understand, and I'll be hanged if I don't find out what it is," he ended, fishing for his pipe, and ramming tobacco down the poor thing's throat, until it was crammed to overflowing.

Laura had nodded gravely and intelligently at the right moments during his story.

"None of this surprises me," she remarked, when he had finished what he had to say. "Something like it was bound to happen to Nona. But I should imagine in your present state of temper that you're exaggerating the importance of it, Richard, and in any case, I don't see what you can do about it."

"Do?" he exclaimed. "Why — stop it, stop it!"

"How?"

"Oh, I don't know — kill somebody I guess, if I have to."

"That would be very rash of you," she observed calmly.

"I thought you cared for Sylvus."

"I do."

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"Well, then how can you think I'll stand by and let his wife be talked about in the same breath with another man?"

"Dear boy, Nona will always be talked about. She's that type. There's no *especial* harm, I'm sure, in her — friendship with Mr. Dietrich —"

"I did n't say that," he cried. "I guess if I thought there was really anything serious doing, I'd have dusted the street with him by now. But there's enough to make me mad now I think of it. For instance, why has n't Dietrich gone out West? It's weeks now since he promised me he'd go."

"There may be other reasons," said Laura mildly.

"There *may* be, but I should n't wonder if Nona was n't one of 'em — and that's a reason too many."

"You're jumping at conclusions."

"You've got to jump to get somewhere, have n't you? He's not acting square with me, Dietrich is n't."

"That's different," she said, frowning slightly. "Is it really so important to you that he should have left at once?"

"Why, of course, it is. He's got something of a job ahead of him — it'll take time you know, to do the thing right. And by the spring I've counted on *facts* to lay before the prospective board of directors. I've got to know what's the best State to settle my

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college in, the prices of land — and a few other very important things.”

“Have you the directors already?” said Laura.

“Dietrich’s got several big men interested. Of course they won’t commit themselves till they have the thing laid before them in data. They’re cautious, but if it’s worked right they’ll put money in it for the sake of being called philanthropists. Oh, Dietrich’s managed *them* up to a certain *point* only they want to be sure the money’s going to show. Of course they’ve a right —”

“But Dietrich’s done all this for you in a marvelously short time. Surely it’s proof enough that he means to carry it through.”

“Yes,” said Richard, pulling at his beard, “but I want to see him pack his bag and *go*. You see, he may have a good bit of looking around before he finds what we want. I don’t know about real-estate prices in the West, and that’s where I want to settle. As soon as I know that, and get capital promised *on paper* I want to start an architect’s competition for building.”

“That’s a good idea.” She seemed anxious to start him talking on his pet subject as if to make him forget Nona.

“Yes, it ought to be. And it is n’t going to be a gobbling game for the big architect concerns either. The young men are going to have a chance.”

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"Richard, you're a wonderful man."

"Oh, hang all that. Well, here we are back again. Now, Allen's not playing fair —"

"You're judging too quickly."

"I've been worried some time now."

"And Sylvus?" questioned Laura. She sat straight in her chair, her head bent in grave attention, her eyes thoughtful.

"That's another thing. He doesn't know what's going on; he doesn't know that another man's fooling around his wife too much. He's clean wrapped up in his music. He lets Nona run loose all over the place."

"Come, come, Richard, you're in a bad way," she said soothingly. But the thought in her eyes deepened.

"Now, take only yesterday. I left Sylvus at seven and Nona was n't home. What right had she to be gallivanting around at that hour alone, or worse still, now I come to think of it, with Dietrich. I bet she was with him."

"Did Sylvus seem upset?"

"He? Oh, dear, no. Only said 'Nona has lots of friends,' when I asked where the devil she was."

"It's a pity," said Laura, gently, shaking her head. "But I don't see what you or I can do, unless you hurry Mr. Dietrich's trip West. This is

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the result of most nervous women to-day." A faint flavor of irony tinged her voice.

Richard bit viciously at his pipe stem. A wicker chair creaked beneath his weight. "That's nonsense," he said.

"Sylvus forgets that Nona's a modern woman," pursued Laura unruffled.

"Good Lord, can't there be anything ideal and pure in a modern woman?"

He jumped from the chair and started pacing again.

She frowned slightly. "Nona's not a woman to be idealized."

"What woman's a man going to have ideals about, if it is n't his wife?" He leaned suddenly over and thumped the writing table with a vehement fist. A few stray sheets of paper trembled and fluttered, the ink heaved in a small wave to the edge of the inkstand. "Dietrich's got to go, and he's got to go soon."

He fidgeted a moment and then burst forth violently.

"Look, Laura. You're the only woman I can talk to. And I've just got to explode now. I needed a man like Dietrich. There's no getting around it. If he wants to, he can do big things for me. I've had this scheme some years, but no one I went to would touch it. I *can't* handle it—

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that's the reason — I go wild. Dietrich can. He knows how to deal with people. Rich men will spend their money all right, if you get *at* 'em. Of course you can't do anything with the education of a country unless you spend money on it. And I *feel* there's stuff here, only it's got to be trusted. It's not going to repay with interest yet awhile."

"A prophet in his own country," murmured Laura.

"A prophet? That's what they call a madman. They don't even call me that. And I've done nothing as yet. I've fine schemes, but you can knock 'em down like nine pins. Anyway the time'll come —"

He stood erect, his face upturned shone grandly mystic for a moment; pale light from the window fell full upon his blazing hair and beard; his right hand rose slowly in gesture of prophecy. "The time *will* come — perhaps not in my day — that's what I keep telling myself when I grow weary. But the men who scoff at dreamers of one century, build churches the next with those same dreams. America has the world's history behind it and its own to make. Its genius is its *will*."

He was talking now as if to himself — Laura, Dietrich, Nona, all of them forgotten.

"Richard, my poor Richard, nations are bulky things and move slowly," said Laura.

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He frowned slightly down upon her, then his head sank forward on his chest, his big, red beard dropped like a lowered flag. He shook his great shoulders as if to rid himself of a burden. "And I'm at the mercy of men like Dietrich who dally and dawdle and promise."

Laura smiled faintly and settled further back in her chair. "You've made one mistake," she said. "You're not at the mercy of America's men but of its women. The big executive masculine minds of to-day, are not in danger from their grandmothers and mothers, but from their wives and daughters. There are several types of women to-day who must be considered. The nervous, mental woman and the nervous, frivolous woman. There's even a combination of the two which is the worst. There is no bad in Nona. But it is n't Dietrich's fault, all this — it's Nona's, I'm sure."

"Nona's!"

"Yes; education sharpens dangerous things in woman. Nature remains the same, simple to deal with on a primitive basis. But the instincts of nature grow complicated and overreach themselves. Most women can't separate their intellect from their emotions, and while intellect is a result of evolution, emotions have much to do with nerves. Nona, for instance, has what might be called an inordinate amount of emotional vanity transplanted to her in-

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tellect. I should call her an over-refined progression of herself."

"All that sounds well," interrupted Richard, "but I don't see where the point comes in."

"Don't you? Women like Nona take the initiative. They are consumed and devoured by a curiosity to sound their own and other people's emotional depths, to test their magnetism, so to speak. They're above all challenged by masculine egoism. Allen Dietrich represents the type of man who fascinates women like Nona. He is a superb egoist and something of a brute."

"So you think she's running after him?" said Richard grimly.

"I think she does n't realize it but that's what she's doing. And there's another reason. She's hunting for a lost self, hoping to find it in a man. She's seen a pale ghost of it in Sylvus's soul. But she won't recognize it so soon as real. She wants an undefined fulfilment, a dramatic finding of self. She's seeking completion in emotion for an unplaced intellect. Dietrich, in spite of himself, is stirred by this mysterious search, and attributes it to other things—simpler, more brutal things. Nona can't leave him alone. And so perhaps another two will blindly mistake what they each have not, for what they each want."

"O Lord," groaned Richard, putting his hand

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helplessly up to his forehead, "you're a fine psychologist, Laura. But the business sounds worse now you've got through dissecting it. What's to be done?"

"I suggest that you leave it alone," she said calmly. "Nona has to solve her own problems."

"Hang Nona. What about Sylvus?"

"Sylvus is in the position of a man who has bet on a horse, and does n't realize the race is going on until he's won or lost."

"Well, I'll go to Dietrich."

"Don't you do anything so foolish." Rising from her chair she went over to where Richard stood and put a restraining hand on his arm. "When will you learn, my poor friend, the futility of playing God's rôle? There's just one thing you *can* do."

"What's that?"

"You can *remind* Mr. Dietrich that he should go West. And above all—" she lifted a warning finger—"not a word of Nona. He has the right to resent the mention of her name. There's no real cause for a fight."

"Well, if there was, I'd kill him," said Richard.

"Yes, of course you would. But don't. When do you expect to see him?"

"At that idiotic Mitchell woman's party to-morrow night."

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"What! You going there?"

"She postponed her old party until I'd finished her bust and she bothered the life out of me until I said I'd go. Sylvus is going too."

"Have a little talk with Dietrich. Tell him nicely that there's no time to be wasted. And *don't* be hasty with him."

"You're right — you're always right," cried Richard. "You're a blue-ribbon woman, Laura."

She smiled affectionately. "Infant Richard the lion-hearted, when will you learn control?"

"Never!" he said. "I'm going to be rude and leave you right away, Laura. It does me good to talk to you. But I can't stay shut up in the house any longer. I've got to get out and walk."

"Well, go then and come back when you feel like it."

He stood hesitating. "You don't mind?"

"Of course not!"

"I don't know what I'd do without you, Laura."

She led the way to the door and flung it wide.

"Go out and walk."

He took her hand in his bear grip and held it a moment. "Thanks, Athene." Then he went down the stairs two at a time and plunged again out into the darkening streets.

"I'll make 'em behave!" he thought to himself as he strode away.

CHAPTER IX

A BRISK, clear morning dawned, with thin snow-icing nicely spread over the city world. The streets and houses seemed caught in a prism of diamond frieze, sewn together by icicle needles and glued in crystal drops of cold. The sky looked like a smooth skating pond. There was glisten as of a myriad white and gray mirrors beneath the biting shine of a January sun. Horses and people gyrated and fell in crazy dips and angles of helpless uncontrol; drivers and chauffeurs swore at the state of things and every chance they found, wrung frozen fingers or played self-flagellation with their arms. It was the kind of morning when all energetically inclined beings should have been out of doors, racing in the quick, sharp air, heads down, noses muffled in furs, and feet snapping quickly at the pavements, for fear of being frozen.

Under most circumstances Nona would have answered the clarion note of the morning with the vitality of her buoyant love of vagabondage. But this morning she was unusually quiet and unusually busy. Mrs. Mitchell was giving her famous party

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that evening and Nona was already preparing for it. She sat in a low chair by the window, dexterously twisting together a hair ornament composed of a bit of purple tulle and an aigrette. While her fingers worked, her thoughts leaped forward to the warm coming hours of lights and people, of dancing and Allen Dietrich. She fitted the image of him so cleverly in with the other delights that it did not appear unduly the principal reason for her anticipation.

Nona had a convenient talent for regularizing plausibly those things in life which at some dim starting point might need explanation. She would not perhaps have acknowledged that the hair ornament and all the other charming attentions she proposed to lavish upon her personal appearance for the evening were so many artfully designed weapons for Allen's benefit. It was, of course, a natural instinct of seduction in the female, which led her so to array herself when opportunity becomingly offered. But there was a peculiar zest now, a sensitive pleasure at idea of the finished product, the Nona dressed and ready, which bore suspicious evidences of address to one appreciation.

She was pleased with the hair ornament and tried it on in front of the mirror, twisting her head from side to side like a bird in contemplation of a discovered crumb of bread. So absorbed indeed was

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she that she did not even turn at a gentle creak from the door. Only when there was a distinct noise, as of some one stumbling, and a faint exclamation, did she look behind her. Then she ran quickly forward. Sylvus coming in had knocked against a chair. He bent painfully forward, one hand to his knee.

"Oh, Sylvus," she cried, all concern, "did you hurt yourself?"

"It's nothing, dear."

She led him gently to a chair, and sliding on the floor beside him, started rubbing his knee.

"You've bruised it, you poor darling," she said. "I'm so sorry, because it's my fault. I didn't think, and moved the furniture again. You couldn't know a chair was in the middle of the room."

"It doesn't hurt any more and it wasn't your fault. I walked too quickly. I came in expecting Petroff to be here. He's going to look over the first part of my concerto with me." His hands strayed to her hair which he caressed gently. "What is that on your head?"

She touched the ornament. "Oh, that's just a thing I'm fixing for to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, it's Mrs. Mitchell's party, you know, Sylvus."

"Yes, yes," he said quickly. "Of course, I

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should have remembered. Are you dressing for it already, Nona?"

"Dear me, no," she answered laughing and unpinned the ornament. "I was just making this thing."

"Clever little woman. Is it very pretty?" His voice was a trifle wistful.

She held it out and looked it over critically, her head to one side. "It's going to be. I wish you could see it, Sylvus—" The moment she had spoken she was sorry. She never liked to mention the wish that he could see.

But he was not so sensitive on that subject as she. "I wish I could, darling," and he patted her head absent-mindedly. "Petroff will be magnificent in my concerto." Already his thoughts wended dreamy way back to his music.

She scrambled to her feet. "He's sure to be but I hate Petroff."

"Hate Petroff?"

"Yes," she said energetically, "I hate him. There he is now, speaking of the devil. The bell just rang."

"Oh, Nona!"

She stood drumming on the window pane, and barely nodded to Petroff as he came into the room. He was unsmiling this morning, more of a livid, impassive mask than ever. Sylvus greeted him

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cordially. She would have left them together, but she had nothing to do for an hour yet and Antonin had taken possession of her bedroom with praiseworthy intention to give it a good cleaning. So she stayed near the window and said nothing. "I kiss your hand, Madame," said Petroff, without approaching her.

"Thank you."

"I have not had the pleasure of finding you home of late, when I have been with Monsieur Leete," he continued imperturbably. "No doubt there are many enjoyable affairs going on now — many *plaisirs mondains*. Ah, *cher Maître*," he sighed, "you and I are nothing but poor musicians in the world of pleasure."

Sylvus smiled. "Nona's in demand everywhere. Yesterday she went to three teas."

She blushed and tapped her foot impatiently on the floor. As luck would have it, Petroff, driving by in a hansom on his way to Sylvus's, had seen her and Dietrich coming out of the Waldorf. She had rushed through her three teas earlier in the afternoon, for the sake of sitting an hour with Allen over a couple of cocktails. Petroff smiled.

"Ah, *les femmes*, they are wonderful," he said politely. "How is it that you manage to be so many places in an afternoon?"

She knew that he did not believe for a moment

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her story about the teas. And in her distrust of this man, she wished she had mentioned the truth to Sylvus. Only Sylvus did not approve of cocktails, and it would have troubled him to think of her drinking in a hotel with any man, even Dietrich. That much she acknowledged quickly to herself, but it did not make her feel comfortable. The omission of the truth appeared sordid and stupid. She felt caught in a falsely embarrassing lie, that was not so much a lie as a passive neglect of the truth. All at once she made up her mind.

"I did more than that even," she said defiantly. "I forgot to tell you last night, Sylvus, I met Allen Dietrich at the last tea, and we stopped a moment at the Waldorf for a cocktail."

Petroff signaled her a swift glance of what might have been admiration. She read his mind. He was thinking that she had proved herself a daring and clever woman. Strangely enough the idea actually flattered her.

"What, that also? You teach us many things, Madame," he said smoothly.

"Oh, did you, Nona?" Sylvus, as she had foreseen, was not pleased. Indeed, his voice sounded unusually remonstrating. "I wish you had n't gone to the Waldorf with Mr. Dietrich, dear. Could n't you have brought him here?"

"I suppose so, I never thought," she answered

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carelessly. Mysterious and obscure are the consciences of women! She was in good humor again and felt no compunction at the tiny juggling of facts. According to her conscience, she had now told Sylvus the truth, before Petroff, proving to herself and him the innocence of a situation which had only been uncomfortable because of his disagreeable interpretation of it.

Petroff wandered towards the piano, without again looking at her. There was as much significance in his ignoring of her just then, as in his previous stares.

"*Cher Maître*, how is the concerto going?" "It's going—it's going," cried Sylvus eagerly, the incident of the Waldorf forgotten. "We might try some of it now. I've had it copied for you. Of course you couldn't read the Braille."

The bell rang once more, and the door opened to admit Richard Worden. Nona had seen little of him lately and now their meeting was not cordial. He barely nodded to Petroff, addressing himself to Sylvus.

"Do you know what that Mitchell woman has done? She's put on her cards 'To meet Richard Worden.' Did you ever hear of such nerve?"

"Why, she's proud to have you there," said Sylvus, gently. "You see it's given for you and the bust."

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"How ridiculous," stormed Richard. "It'd serve her right if I did n't go. I've a mind not to."

"Why, you must go," cried Nona. "You can't be so rude."

"It would serve her right," mumbled the big man, searching in his pocket for a friendly pipe.

"Oh, you'll go to keep *me* company," said Sylvus.

"Well, I'm not any show monkey, I'll tell you that." He rammed tobacco in his pipe and lit it with a violent scratch of a match on the sole of his shoe.

Petroff at the piano, played softly from a manuscript before him.

"That's the opening of my concerto," exclaimed Sylvus, his face lighting. "Louder, Petroff — louder!"

The pianist obeyed and thundered the notes.

"It's great," said Richard, puffing at his pipe. "But it's kind of beyond me, Sylvus."

"Indeed, it is n't. Listen —" Sylvus rose, went over to the piano and felt for his violin. Petroff played on.

"Where is it? Where's my case?"

"It's on the floor. I'll get it," said Nona. She opened the case with practised hands, and handed him the Amati, from its silk wrappings.

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“Listen —” commanded the composer.

Petroff stopped playing and Sylvus drew his bow gently over the strings.

“This is my theme.”

“It’s beautiful, is n’t it?” whispered Nona.

Petroff turned and looked at her curiously. There was an indefinable fiber of frailty in Sylvus’s music, a limpid, transparent quality to his inspiration which suggested untroubled, green water. No great shadow or pain brooded over the peace of this fluid melody — no mystery of despair, or cry of a haunted world. Fever could not scorch nor tears burn nor moaning of struggling creatures in the dark of their lost selves, be felt in the untouched, unquivering theme that flowed from the blind man’s bow. Sylvus lived safe in his world of contemplation and faith. Nona listening grew sad as if in this music she held a false place. Her lost selves floated serene, unrecognized beyond her reach or call. They passed her as in a night.

Soon he laid down his violin. “That’s as far as I’ve gone.”

Petroff rose from the piano and pressed the composer’s hand. “*Maitre*, the work is *magistrale!*” he said.

Sylvus shook his head. “Not yet — not yet. It’s to be my work of light, my Concerto of Light. It will be better — later.”

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"It's a mighty pretty bit of work," cried big Richard warmly.

Nona said nothing. Her face had grown thoughtful, the expression in her eyes soft and far away.

"Say, Sylvus, when my college goes through, you'll come out and play for us once in a while," said Worden, leaning against the mantelpiece and refilling his pipe, which had gone out.

"Indeed I will. I'm so happy to think things are coming enough your way to make it possible for you to ask me already," said Sylvus.

"Well, I don't know," Richard spoke with slow deliberation. "The business is n't going so quick as I want it to."

Nona came near to where he stood and listened. She was sure that he would mention Dietrich and in the presence of this big man, she felt all at once a resentful antagonism.

"It's Dietrich who's holding us back," continued Worden and stared full at her. She stirred slightly, but met his look with defiance.

"That surprises me," said Sylvus.

"How does Mr. Dietrich hold you all back?" Her voice sounded hard and sharp. "It seems to me from what I hear, he's been doing most of the work."

"He has n't done all he's promised."

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"What has Monsieur Dietrich promised?" Petroff's question slid into the conversation. He did not glance in Nona's direction.

"He promised to start out West for me; some time ago. The whole thing's waiting for that trip and its results. He has n't gone."

"But I thought such big enterprises took a long time to arrange," ventured Sylvus mildly.

"It's already taken years of my life and ambitions," answered Richard in a gruff voice. "No, sir—I'm a man who claims a promise to be a promise. Dietrich's disappointing me."

"I don't see how you can *expect* him to leave at a moment's notice and go off on such a long trip," cried Nona suddenly.

Richard turned upon her with a gesture which was almost savage.

"There are lots of things you don't understand, Nona." He stopped short, and gave his long-suffering beard a violent tug.

She glared at him like an incensed child. "I understand better than you think I do, and you've no right to speak to me that way."

"Nona," said Sylvus in a shocked voice. "*Don't* lose your temper. You two must n't *quarrel*."

"We are n't *quarreling*," retorted Nona, "but Richard always treats me like a baby."

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"Then don't act like one," grumbled the sculptor.

"Ah, *les femmes*," whispered Petroff as if to himself.

The situation threatened to become very unpleasant. Worden was not a man to be cowed by an impatient or angry woman, and Nona, all her secret grievances against him roused by his complaints of Dietrich, quivered with ill-restrained dislike and temper.

"I won't hear my friends accused of things that are n't so," she said, her eyes flashing at him.

"Humph!" he turned his shoulder to her.

"One is fortunate to be your friend," murmured Petroff. She wheeled upon him, ready to include him in her displeasure.

"You keep out of this discussion, Monsieur Petroff."

"Nona," remonstrated poor Sylvus.

"Richard, when you wish to apologize for your impertinence, you may. If Sylvus allows his friends to treat his wife as if she were a nobody, I have nothing more to say." She gathered the remnants of her dignity together, put her hand up to her hair, tucked in a few stray locks, and walked out of the room.

"Nona," called Sylvus after her. "Nona!"

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But she did not turn back. Her eyes were full of smarting tears.

"Phew! what a firebrand!" exclaimed Worden.

Petroff smiled. "It is spleen, Monsieur Worden."

"I'm so sorry. I've never known her to act this way." Sylvus was badly troubled and upset. "She must be ill or tired."

"Never mind," said Worden. "Women are crazy creatures at best." But he stared hard into the fire, and still pulled at his beard. Some one had once remarked that they could not understand how Worden kept his beard. It must grow while he slept, for when he was awake he seemed to be always dragging it out by the roots.

"*Cher Maître*, I must go. It is late." Petroff shook hands with Sylvus and bowing ceremoniously to Richard said suavely, "To-night at the charming Madame Mitchell's."

"Is that monkey going too?" growled Richard as soon as they were alone.

"Why, don't *you* like him either? — Nona does n't like him."

"It's one point upon which she and I agree."

"Poor Richard," said Sylvus gently. "I can feel that you're worried. But it will turn out all right. Mr. Dietrich, I'm sure, is not the man to disappoint you."

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“He ’ll do what I want — in the end.” Worden squared his broad shoulders, put his pipe back in his pocket and strode over towards Sylvus. “Yes, he ’ll do that. Only I *am* a bit worried, Sylvus boy. I ’ll be getting along. I ’ll see you at that blooming show to-night.”

He took himself off with a serious frown on his honest face.

CHAPTER X

MRS. LANCELOT MITCHELL lived at the Plaza Hotel, therein attaining a much higher scale of magnificence than she could have done by keeping house. For, however large a house may be, a hotel is always larger. Live in the latter long enough, and through a delicate process of legitimate suggestion, a vast and facile sense of ownership may be acquired. The liveried attendants are at beck and call; the entire pleasant machinery of modern comfort set in motion, works obedient to individual commands; the trouble of thinking and directing every-day luxuries does not exist.

For instance in giving an entertainment, Mrs. Mitchell had only to indicate stage settings, and in a few hours, as if by enchantment, her most languid or vaguest wishes found themselves realized in an almost incredibly smooth way. May it here be remembered that to Mrs. Mitchell the process of entertaining was more important than anything else representing the entire painful and arduous pur-

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suit after the pleasure of being considered in certain circles "a prominent hostess." To be at least a successful hostess was the duty of a lifetime, the necessary payment for every elysian advantage of acknowledged situation. Mrs. Mitchell considered herself very much in Society, and so she was, according to many acquaintances who proclaimed their own impregnable position by defending hers — when it was attacked. Society, as it is recognized, is no common humanitarian brotherhood affair, instituted for common good-will, but a comparative condition of superior exclusion; a wary heeding of fortunes, ranks and tastes; a scale of mercurial snobbisms, unscrupulously progressive. The baker's daughter, according to its laws, may not associate with the coal-heaver's son, any more than the department-store owner's wife may dine with the widow who keeps a stationery shop in the same street. By the same laws, the unapproachable, labeled beings who dictate extravagances from a lofty peak of tradition or colossal fortunes are hardly aware of Mrs. Mitchell who lives at the Plaza Hotel; although a few of them, when convenient, may have a vague bowing suspicion of her existence.

Mrs. Mitchell knew a few senators, some stock-exchange men on their upward way towards brilliant financial success, and nearly all the titled

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Italians in New York who are, it is true, easy enough to know since what they most sensibly wish is to amuse themselves, wherever amusement offers. She commanded also several men like Allen Dietrich. It is true that Dietrich and his kind could afford to take phlegmatically and with no great appearance of excitement, any such scheming and fluttering as their hostesses chose to go through for their benefit.

Not so, however, with another set which Mrs. Mitchell prided herself upon collecting. This was what is sometimes known as the "artistic set." People who "did things" were useful to know especially in giving parties. They amused the people who did nothing and were often pathetically grateful for the opportunity of mixing, so to speak, with the smart world. Besides, she liked to advertise broad mindedness, and there was always a slight necessity for it, where artists and their reception were concerned.

It was quite daring and clever sounding to give a party *for* a sculptor; although, incidentally, a sculptor might have been at a party given for someone else. But Mrs. Mitchell did not do things by halves. Enthusiastic over the bust of herself and its artist, the good lady had bidden for this evening, to the imposingly lighted salons of the big suite all those whom she felt might be "useful" to

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Worden. It was her method of being appreciative.

Dressed in an amazing green chiffon gown, she shuffled her guests like a pack of cards, until they were happily strewn in decorative groups around the bust which was proudly enthroned on a marble pedestal. She would like to have chained Worden to it for the evening, so that in showing off one, she might as easily show off the other, but unhappily Worden proved recalcitrant. He refused to be exhibited, and almost as soon as he arrived, was seen slinking crossly off in the far shadow of the dining-room.

Poor well-meaning Mrs. Mitchell was obliged constantly to send amiable young men in search of him when she wished to present him to the senator from Ohio, and Mrs. Crimmins, a dowager, and Monsieur de Lalmes, the Frenchman who wanted to study American types, until finally after the third time of this sending for him and his re-disappearance, he refused point blank to be introduced to another soul.

"Can't do it, my boy," he shook his red mane at the last young man envoy. "Can't do it. I've shaken enough hands already. I only came to this blooming show to meet a man I want to see. D'you happen to know if Allen Dietrich's here yet?"

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"Yes, he arrived a while ago," answered the youth pleasantly. "He was talking to a very pretty woman with red hair, the last I saw of him. You'd better come back with me to the drawing-room, and probably you'll find him there still."

"Humph!" growled Richard. "Look here, young man, do me a good turn, will you? Since you seem to be a kind of special messenger, find Mr. Dietrich and tell him I'm emptying the punch bowl and Scotch bottle and would like him to look me up."

"Of course, I'll tell him," said the young man politely. He was one of those unfortunate, good-natured beings who have gained the reputation of being obliging and have not the courage to prove anything else.

Without demur now, he shouldered and elbowed his way among the glittering stream of arrivals, his head craned very high over his very high collar, his eyes roving conscientiously past pigeon-breasted young women, garlanded with pearls, diamond-stomached matrons, and dazzling expanses of men's shirts. At last he was rewarded by the sight of Dietrich, who, as it happened, was trying to wrench himself away from the gorgonizing grip of an ugly old woman, who had known his mother. The youth whispered his message and was silently blessed. Dietrich bowed, murmured to the old

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woman, and hurried off in the direction of the punch bowl.

To-night he looked at his best. As he crossed the tightly packed rooms he gave the impression of a certain *svelte* poise and nicety of silhouette, which projected him finely forward in well-bred contrast to the crowd of rather gross, over-fed personages enjoying Mrs. Mitchell's magnificent hospitality. His eyes were appraising when he stared at the women, his mouth, between its dark mustache and soldier-like goatee expressed a certain amount of conscious sensuality, his hands were unexpectedly strong and muscular in shape.

Worden was waiting, leaning his huge weight against the edge of an imposing refreshment table. He was smoking a wicked, black cigar, and a half-filled glass of Scotch and soda stood at his elbow.

"Evening, glad you turned up," he vouchsafed.

"Well," said Dietrich good-humoredly, "what are *you* doing here, my convivial friend? The main body of the party is still admiring your work in the front room."

"That's why I'm here. But they'll be hunting out this punch bowl soon. It's a devil of nuisance that one can't get away from people at parties."

"The reluctant lion!" Allen smiled easily and poured himself a companion glass of Scotch.

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“Good stuff.” He held up his glass to the light.

Worden squared his shoulders and thrust his hands in his pockets. “Look here, how about our West business?” he said abruptly. Dietrich put his glass down, and carefully lit a cigarette.

“Oh, yes, about that business,” he said. “I’ve been meaning to see you the last few days. I had a talk with Deverin last week. He was n’t encouraging.”

“Deverin?”

“Yes, the big oil man, you know. He’s worth millions, but he’s interested just now in a fund for heroes he’s started in Germany, and he would n’t listen to anything else.”

“Germany!” snorted Richard. “What the devil is he founding it in Germany for!”

“The Emperor wrote personally to thank him, I believe,” answered Dietrich evasively. “He has German blood somewhere in his family. In any case he does n’t care for our scheme—says it is n’t practical, says it would n’t *work*. I’m sorry. I’d hoped he would be one of our biggest subscribers.”

Richard swore. “Let him go then. I thought we had enough money promised. Say, Dietrich, when are you going out West?”

“That was another thing I wanted to speak to you about.”

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"I'm counting on you," said Worden.

Dietrich smoked his cigarette thoughtfully. "Of course I'll do all I can."

"When do you think you'll go?" insisted Richard. "I kind of thought you'd have started by now. Time's passing, you know, and by the spring we wanted the thing well under way."

"I can't quite say now when I can start," answered Dietrich slowly. "The truth is that since we decided I should go I've been pretty busy."

"Busy, eh?"

"You know I have a few affairs of my own to tend to." There was a faint suspicion of sarcasm in his voice. "Lately they've been bothering me a bit. There's been delay about the payment of some of my rents. I haven't been able to leave town."

"You have your business agent," said Worden bluntly.

"I'm not satisfied with his competence."

Worden refilled his glass. "Look here, Dietrich, let's you and I be honest. A few weeks ago you were keen on this proposition of mine. You were all for starting at once. I counted on you for big things. But I've felt lately that it doesn't interest you as much. Come, out with it! Are you trying to back out or not?"

"Of course I'm not," said Dietrich quickly.

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"Of course I'm not. But these things can't be rushed, my dear fellow."

"You offered yourself to go out West," went on Worden, "and I've been waiting to see you start. I want to know where I stand, that's all."

Dietrich said nothing for a moment.

"Because if you're going, I can't see any point to postponing it." Worden controlled himself with difficulty. He was growing excited.

"I've every intention of going," said Dietrich dryly, "but as I have tried to explain I did n't foresee these hindrances. I can't leave as soon as I had hoped to do. Later —"

"What do you mean by later?"

"Within a month perhaps."

"You should go before. The thing's in your hands and it's up to you to make good."

"I shall do what I have promised, when I can," said Allen stiffly.

"So you're not backing out?"

"No."

"Well then, the quicker you start, the better it'll be. I'm a blunt man, Dietrich. I don't waste phrases. But I'm a man who keeps his word. If I did n't have my work, I'd pack up to-night and save you the trouble. But I can't afford to leave. Now I understand you have no ties —" he paused and looked Dietrich full in the eyes.

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"No," said Dietrich steadily. "No, I have no ties to speak of."

Worden drew a deep breath and pulled at his beard. "I'm glad to hear it. I'm very glad to hear it," he cried. "I'm particularly glad to know it."

"Why?" Dietrich's voice was cool and slightly challenging.

The big man made an impulsive movement forward as if he were about to speak, then restrained himself. "Oh, a notion of mine. Always glad to hear a man is n't tied down — women and all that sort of thing."

Dietrich's hand went up to his mustache which he stroked with a rather bored air. "Perhaps you're right," he said, obviously ready to drop the subject.

People were beginning to find their way into the room, and the waiters, suddenly animated to their responsibilities, balancing plates and glasses aloft, started perilous trips from group to group. The room filled quickly with sound of light chatter and laughter. Its atmosphere grew heavy and intoxicating; it smelt of women and perfume and champagne.

Dietrich looked away towards the door. "They're having supper early," he remarked. He and Worden moved aside to leave place for an in-

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flux of hungry guests. Suddenly across the room, making her way lightly, came Nona. She caught sight of the two men and waved her hand.

"So it's understood," said Worden again. "It's understood that I can count on you."

"As soon as possible," promised Dietrich.

"What, as soon as possible?" Nona had joined them and questioned Dietrich tapping his arm with her fan.

"Business," said Worden, curtly, before the other could answer.

"Thank you, Richard, I guessed as much." She flouted a shoulder at him and continued her appeal to Allen. "You were talking about that old Art University, were n't you?"

"Yes," he said gravely.

"Well?" she cocked her head to one side like an inquisitive bird and smiled. By her smile, Dietrich seemed in some subtle way leagued with her against Worden, as he stood there, his face turned slightly away from her, its lines stronger and wearier than ever, his eyes uncommunicative. An intimacy established between them vibrated. Without his looking at her, she thought she knew what was in his mind.

"I should hope, after this morning, you'd had enough of that, Nona," said Richard, gruffly. "But if you must know, there's nothing new."

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Only Dietrich's promised me he won't put off going West much longer."

"Oh," said Nona. The veins and pulses in her head beat all of a sudden more fiercely and she felt eager to plunge through the evening without another thought to Dietrich or Worden. If Dietrich had left that instant for the West, she would have laughed in his face, as he bid her good-by. She laughed now, glowing with a strange sensation of strength and indifference to all things.

"I think you're quite right to urge Mr. Dietrich to go," she found herself saying. "He's lazy, isn't he? when it comes down to work." She was as delighted as a mischievous child at his frown.

Richard stared at her a moment with a puzzled expression. "Well, well," he mumbled in his beard and stalked off.

"Nona," said Allen in a low voice, coming closer to her. "Nona, did you mean that?"

"What?" she stared up at him, still smiling, twirling her fan. "Now you see, my dear man, one can't trifle with Worden. He goes about with huge pins, pinning down people who've promised him things."

Before Allen could answer her, she had slipped away, looking back to see if he would follow. But he stood quite still. Suddenly heedless of where she was going she collided with Petroff and

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Monsieur de Lalmes, who were standing in the middle of the room.

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” she murmured and flew on towards Sylvus whom she saw in the doorway, looking very vague and lost.

There flitted over the Frenchman’s face a surprised and charmed smile. He put up his monocle and stared after her.

“Who is that lady?” he inquired. Petroff shrugged his shoulders ever so faintly. “That is Madame Leete, the wife of the blind violinist. *Elle est charmante, n’ est-ce pas?*”

“I should not dare have such a wife and be blind,” said de Lalmes slowly.

“You are right, *mon cher*, but then—” he shrugged his shoulders again. “Are not husbands always blind?”

CHAPTER XI

AFTER supper, there was music. Two young girls whom Mrs. Mitchell had unearthed, no one knew from where, played a romantic duet on mandolins, which were tied up and smothered with Neapolitan ribbons. The young girls, with conscious faces, picked daintily at the strings, producing a thin, wiry tinkle of melody, which could hardly be heard above the babble in the room. People had not settled down yet to listen. They drifted, looking over their shoulders and whispering. Many of the men had remained in the shelter of the dining-room, where obliging waiters opened champagne bottles.

The American Beauty roses, festooning the walls, were already drooping and faded. Women used their fans and handkerchiefs. Some one suggested opening a window, but once opened there was a shivery draft and efficacious remonstrance from near-by, cautious old ladies. Mrs. Mitchell worked hard. It seemed as if she doubled and tripled herself as hostess, appearing with bewildering rapidity in all places at once, directing everybody to do things they did not want to do.

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"Oh, *there* you are, Mr. Worden, you naughty creature." She pounced upon the unhappy man, who had been lured into the music-room and was trying to skulk back to the punch bowl. "*Do* come and sit by Mrs. Crimmins — she's *crazy* about the bust. But *every one* is. You're having such a success! Oh, where are all the men? If I only dared give a party without drinks!" Worden collapsed sulkily into a chair next a terrible old lady, who looked like a python, was deaf and dressed in shining cherry satin.

Allen had joined Nona and they were standing rather vaguely in the middle of the room, when Mrs. Mitchell bore down upon them.

"You two children in these chairs' here in the corner. Is n't that nice of me? Allen, I've always been your friend, have n't I? You look perfectly fascinating, my dear, to-night. *Every one* is asking who you are." She smiled playfully and wagged a plumed fan at them.

"What a fool," murmured Allen when she left them.

"She does n't mean anything with it all, and anyway we have two nice seats together. I'm sorry I was horrid a little while ago. But I won't be again." Nona settled like a bird in her place, casting a bewitching side glance at him.

Mrs. Mitchell had passed on to the other end

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of the room where Sylvus stood, rather lost and miserable in the crowd he could not see, which brushed past him with constant scented rustlings. Worden or Nona had been with him the earlier part of the evening and his aloneness was all the more accentuated now that he did not know where they were.

"Oh, Mr. Leete, I've been hunting all over for you," gushed the kind hostess. "Let me see—where would you rather be? You must have a good seat. There'll be some fine music soon. Here's a nice, big chair against the wall. I'll help you to it."

Sylvus allowed himself to be guided, placed and left. He sat erect, his eyes closed. He looked as if he were waiting for some one to come and take him away again, as if it were a game where he must be patient.

"Poor man," whispered Mrs. Mitchell to a friend. "No use putting him in the front row. Do go and talk to him, my dear. His wife's busy, of course. Allen Dietrich is *very* attentive to her. There they are over in the other corner. Rather obvious, don't you think?"

Some one was singing now in a loud soprano—a song about a butterfly who lived after summer was gone, and how very hard it was for the butterfly.

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Mrs. Mitchell stood near the piano, smiling and nodding importantly whenever she could attract any of her guests' attention. The two young girls who had started the evening's entertainment looked impressed and humble. They were now properly forgotten near Sylvus, towards whom they cast occasional timid glances, whispering to one another. They had been present at his last concert.

Nona twisted and turned in her chair, arranging the folds of her gown, staring at the tips of her slippers, and generally conveying to Allen a mood which hinted at a desire for attention. Finally she drew nearer her chair, and whispered behind her fan.

"So you're going?"

"I suppose so."

Her eyes, bright and restless, roved around the room; she tapped a foot on the floor. "That's the way of things. Friends come and go like the seasons."

"And come back again — like the seasons," observed Allen, pretending to watch the woman at the piano, who had sung about the butterfly.

She showed impatience. "The seasons come back," she answered, "but they never find things as they were."

The soprano had been wafted to the background by a polite flutter of applause. Next, a fragile-

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faced youth strolled over to the piano and with a languishing glance at a fat prima donna of past fame, who sat near by, flopped on the piano stool and struck a few thin chords. People nudged one another and paid him the compliment of immediate attention. He was well-known for his manner of singing little French songs. He began now in a "café concert" voice —

"Non, tu ne sauras jamais,
O toi qu'aujourd'hui j'adore.—"

The prima donna chuckled. She liked those songs.

"Tu voudrais savoir si je t'aime,
Mais je ne te le dirais jamais,"

warbled the youth in waltz rhythm, his face turned towards his audience, his arms stretched and stiff to the piano keys.

Nona knew the song. Only a while ago a friend had brought it to her straight from Paris.

She followed the words, waving faint time to the melody with her fan.

"*Non, tu ne sauras jamais,*" reiterated the chorus.

Suddenly she turned to Allen, looked into his eyes and smiling hummed the words—"Tu voudrais savoir si je t'aime." She could not have told why she did anything so obvious and vulgar.

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But there leaped to her mood a deliberate shamelessness of challenge, a reckless desire to see what he would do at such brazen attack. His eyes, meeting hers, were so piercing that under other circumstances, she could not have stood their probing surprise. But with the influence of the warmth about her, the glitter of lights and rustle of voices, she became bold and continued humming the words only loud enough for him to hear.

"Si je t'aime, ou si je te hais."

"You're being very foolish, Nona," he said, all at once.

Her eyebrows rose to a mischievous arch. "Why?"

"You're waking the devil in me," he said. "I think I'd better go West to-night."

"Egoist — go when you please." She played with her fan, and looked away from him. At this moment she caught sight of Sylvus sitting alone far across the room. His meekness of silhouette brought her mood to a sudden, jolting stop, as if some one had tripped her unexpectedly while she was running. He seemed apart from them all — even from her. The thought brought with it a queer, stabbing pain. For a fierce instant, she hated herself. But even if she went over to him then, before all these people, he would smile the same

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gentle smile, with which he always greeted her, not realizing the struggle going on in her soul. He would speak to her softly, as if she, too, had just stepped out of some dream. She sighed and turned back to Allen.

"Do you like me to-night?" She shook her head like a kitten playing with a string.

"Yes."

"I'm glad you do. You like me to-night. To-morrow you may be — out West."

"On consideration, I shall be to-morrow wherever you say." He spoke deliberately and his words were almost a shock to her. They insinuated a sudden, inexplicable change of attitude.

It was her instinct at once to ignore the change. "Suppose I say some place impossible," she said playfully.

"You won't."

She thought a moment. "Do you really mean it?"

"Yes."

She clapped her hands softly, like a pleased child.

"I believe you, and I'll tell you, then, what I suggest. Something I've been longing to do for ages —"

"Tell me what it is."

"We'll go to the country for a day — a nice, long, Arcadian day," she cried, suddenly all en-

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thusiasm. "We'll forget we're ourselves and pretend we're children running away."

"That sounds very tempting," he said gravely. "Only do you think we can forget we're ourselves?"

"We've got to," she hurried on. "It would n't be what I've planned otherwise — a kind of cheating of things as they are. I know how we'll do it, too. We'll get on a train — any train, and ride away into the country, and when we get tired of riding we'll get off and walk, shall we?"

"Yes, we shall," he said, "and it must be tomorrow."

She looked at him quickly. "It's so nice of you," she said then, as if she were thanking him for picking up a fallen handkerchief. "It's so nice of you to understand these impulses of mine and not to think I'm quite mad."

"I want to go," he assured her, "and you're a very wonderful woman, Nona — perhaps the only one I've known since my earliest boyhood, who could make me want to do anything."

She smiled, her eyes grown thoughtful. "I'd like to live in the country."

"No, you would n't."

"You don't know me."

"But I do. I've only got to look at you to know you."

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“To look at me?” She stared involuntarily again, over to where Sylvus sat. “Must one *look* at me to know me?”

“I think you often give yourself away by a gesture or expression,” he said slowly.

“How strange of you to tell me that —”

The music had been intermittently choking and releasing the babble in the room. Now another young man, whom Mrs. Mitchell announced as an amateur genius, played weird harmonies on the piano. He had composed one song in his life, so far, inspired by Verlaine, and with no apologies to Reynaldo Hahn, he wandered into an incoherent maze of notes which introduced his song:

“Il pleure dans mon coeur.”

His voice groped forward, husky and lachrymose; he rolled his eyes and would have sighed if he had not been singing. The collar to his dress coat was velvet, and he wore an abnormally large red flower in his buttonhole. He was very modern and artistic.

“He’s going to make a cycle of them,” explained Mrs. Mitchell to Mrs. Crimmins. “‘Moods of the Heart!’ Isn’t that a beautiful idea? He says he is *sure* it will be published. He knows one of the young men at Schirmer’s.”

“What?” bellowed Mrs. Crimmins. She was

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the deaf old lady with whom Worden had been left earlier in the evening. But he had fled long ago.

"Where's that man?" She turned her python face to the seat vacated by him in his guilty disappearance.

"He's gone," said Mrs. Mitchell, understanding at once of which man it was question.

"What?"

"Gone!"

Mrs. Crimmins snorted. "He never spoke to me once."

"He's an artist — the one who did my bust," shouted Mrs. Mitchell.

"Hum, that explains it."

"They *do* seem to be rude," said poor Mrs. Mitchell, distractedly.

Worden had found his way over to Sylvus, brushed aside the mandolin girls, who were in the same corner, and appropriated an empty gilt chair next his friend, which staggered and creaked beneath his weight.

"Say," he whispered to Sylvus, "let's get out of this. It's awful."

"Nona won't want to go home yet," whispered back Sylvus. "She always has a good time at these things."

Worden towered up for a second, glared about

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the room, caught sight of Nona and Allen, and sank back into the weak, little chair, an unpleasant frown on his face.

"Nona would go all right, if you told her you wanted to. You're too easy with her — take my word for it."

"Oh, no," said Sylvus quickly.

"Look here," advised Richard. "You keep that little wife of yours more at home. She's no kind of woman to be given much freedom, my boy."

"What do you mean?" Sylvus's sightless eyes seemed trying to see, his sensitive face contracted into sudden, puzzled and disturbed lines.

Worden looked at him a moment and then cleared his throat. "I don't mean anything — much. Nona's all right. But keep an eye — I mean —" he fumbled uncomfortably. "Oh, hang it all, I mean women are women, they've got to be kept pretty strict."

"Nona's not like other women," said Sylvus, and his voice sounded gently dignified. "What she does is always right. I hope you're not criticizing her, Richard."

"Oh, no," growled Richard. "Oh, no, but she is a woman just the same, and must be treated as such."

It was at this precise moment that Nona left Allen Dietrich. She had left him at what she con-

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sidered the right moment. They had talked of the day in the country again, then there had fallen a silence between them, the silence of something arranged. It seemed then as if the particular subject exhausted until the next morning, there would be nothing to say. So she had risen softly, giving him the tips of her fingers to hold, and glided across the room to Sylvus. Worden saw her coming. He lumbered up from his little gilt chair and stood awkwardly waiting her nearer approach and then walked off. The rustle of her dress told Sylvus that some one else was close to him. Even before she spoke he knew who it was. "Nona," he exclaimed, his voice surprised and pleased.

She laid a light hand on his knee. "Let's go home, Sylvus. I'm bored to death."

"Really?" His faced glowed with some secret gratification.

"Yes, do you mind?"

"Oh, no."

"Come then." She took his arm. It was during one of the lulls in the tireless music.

Mrs. Mitchell had fluttered up to Petroff who stood by the door with de Lalmes. "Dear Monsieur Petroff," she said, "*every one* has asked if you were not going to play for us to-night. I count on you, just a short little thing—please?" She clasped her hands appealingly. "You would

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be *so* kind. I wanted Mr. Leete to play, but he had n't brought his violin. Is n't that a pity?"

Petroff's impassive mask did not change. He bowed. "Ah, Madame, if it were possible, is there anything I would not do to please you? But I have sprained my thumb—I cannot play to-night."

"Oh, can't you, really?" She gazed at de Lalmes helplessly. "Can't you persuade him, Monsieur?"

De Lalmes smiled. "I am afraid that I cannot, Madame."

When she left them, Petroff murmured, "The courage of some women is colossal. I make my bread with my fingers, and she would have me use them for nothing."

De Lalmes smiled again. "One may always refuse."

Petroff shrugged his shoulders. "I do unless—" he whispered in the Frenchman's ear.

"Ah, that is another matter. *Tiens!* The blind violinist and his wife are leaving. It is a pity. She has pleased me, but she has a little affair, not so, with the tall Monsieur *là-bas?*"

Petroff waved his hands deprecatingly. "*Mon Dieu*, it is natural, with a blind husband."

"Yes, it is natural," agreed the Frenchman.

They both looked towards Nona, who was taking

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leave of Mrs. Mitchell. "We have enjoyed it so much," she said.

"*Why* do you go? There's another supper later, and perhaps — could we *find* a violin for Mr. Leete? *Every one* has been asking if he were going to play."

"I'm sorry," said Nona, keeping firm grasp of Sylvus's arm. "But he can only play with his own violin."

"Yes, I'm sorry," murmured Sylvus gently.

"We could send —" continued the not-to-be-discouraged hostess.

Nona shook her head. "Oh, no, he would n't trust his violin to any one. You've been very kind, and we've had a lovely time, but it's late and we must go."

"Yes, it has been charming," echoed Sylvus.

Mrs. Mitchell put her fan up and whispered behind it to Nona. "Allen *will* be disappointed, my dear. He's still sitting in the corner alone."

Nona laughed lightly. "Oh, well, he'll find some one else for the rest of the evening."

Just then an old lady came up to Mrs. Mitchell who turned away for a moment. Nona profited by it.

"Good night," she said swiftly, and escaped, guiding Sylvus from the room. All the way home she was silent. It was nearly daylight. Once or twice

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she yawned. "Dreadful singing," she volunteered at last. "And what a salad of people."

"Yes," he agreed. "They made a lot of noise. I hope you didn't leave on *my* account though, dear."

"Oh, no," she said, and then as if on an afterthought, "I want to get up early, this morning. I'm going to the country for the day, Sylvus."

"To the country?" The carriage stopped. She paid the driver, unlocked the front door, and led him up the stairs to the apartment.

"Yes," her voice sounded careless. She had to tell him where she was going since it was for a whole day. And after all she did not see why he should not know.

She opened the door of their apartment. He stood patiently in the hall while she turned up the gas. He stood as if he were waiting for some further explanation.

CHAPTER XII

“**B**UT why not?”

She sat on the edge of the bed. Antonin, of course, was not there to valet and she had helped Sylvus undress. While she busied herself about him, finally smoothing the cover up to his chin and putting the lamp where it would not shine in her eyes, she began to talk about her day's trip in the country. She talked about it so convincingly that if there had ever been any doubts in her mind on its propriety they soon were dissipated and she persuaded herself now, that it was most natural to go off with Dietrich for a whole day in the country. She did not notice Sylvus's unwonted silence to her chatter.

“I've been longing and longing to get away from this city, if only for a few hours,” she said, folding his evening coat neatly on a chair. She herself had not undressed. Her gown of a strange shade of purple sheeny stuff, did not lend itself congruously to her domestic activity. The black aigrette in the tulle twined around her hair, vibrated as she moved her head.

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"You see," she went on, "Mr. Dietrich is the only man I know well enough to take me. And he's going West very soon, so it's our good-by party." She was sure that Allen was going West very soon. She herself would urge him to go, and it was only logical, considering, for them to have a farewell spree together.

"I don't know how long he'll be away. Probably some time, if he does all Worden wants him to do. We may be gone when he gets back."

Everything was now nicely arranged in the room for the night. She yawned delicately, as if thinking of her own bed, and turned to kiss Sylvus. He had pushed down the sheet from under his chin, and stretched out his long white hands on the pink comforter. His head was raised slightly among the pillows. In the dim light, he did not look blind.

"I wish you would not go to the country alone with — with a man, Nona," he said.

She stopped short in her hovered pose over him. Never since she could remember had Sylvus objected by word or gesture to any of her wishes or decisions. She could hardly believe that he had done so now.

"What did you say?"

"I wish you would n't go to the country for

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the whole day — that way. I suppose I 'm selfish," he added sadly.

It was then that she settled herself on the edge of the bed and prepared to discuss the question.

"But why not?" She was as aggrieved as a child, to whom something is about to be refused for the first time.

"I — I don't want to be selfish, Nona dear." He chose his words slowly and seemed to speak with much reluctance. "But I 'm sure you 'll agree with me in thinking it 's not quite — quite nice for a young married woman to go off that way."

"Why, the idea!" she cried. "How old fashioned you are, Sylvus. And besides you 're insulting Mr. Dietrich by insinuating that you 're afraid to let me go off with him just for a day."

"I certainly don't intend to insult Mr. Dietrich," said Sylvus with more firmness than she had ever suspected him capable of showing. "Mr. Dietrich is a very charming man, a friend of Richard's and of yours. I beg of you —" his voice entreated, "I beg of you, my dearest, don't misunderstand me in this. I trust my wife always to do right."

"I should hope so."

He sat up in bed, his closed eyes turned to her as if pleading. But she saw no pathos in them just then.

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"It's not for me. I could spare you for a day, easily. I — I have my Concerto to work on, you know, and Petroff's coming to play with me."

"Again?" she felt him unjust. It was as she thought, he would have his music and Petroff but he did not want her to go to the country. What good could she do him by staying at home when he did not need her?

"I am sorry you dislike Petroff. He plays with me as no other pianist has ever done. But I just wanted to show you —" he hesitated.

"You're not *jealous*, I hope." In the face of his unexpected opposition, a cold, obstinate desire to punish and hurt him grew persistent. It was not because of Dietrich especially, although since he was leaving so soon, it was comprehensible that she should want to see him as much as possible and be annoyed at any interference with her plans.

"Jealous!" his face showed such shocked pain that her displeasure was almost appeased. But she restrained the impulse to go to him and make all things right.

"Yes, jealous," she said instead. "Because, you know, I see quite a little of Dietrich."

"I could n't be jealous — how can you suggest such a thing, Nona? I could n't be jealous."

If she had wanted to wound him, she had certainly succeeded. He had grown painfully agi-

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tated, but still showed surprising perseverance of will. "I don't think it's nice for you to go off a whole day with any man who's not your husband," he repeated earnestly.

"Why do you want to deprive me of an innocent pleasure for the sake of an idea of yours about what's nice—" cried Nona, exasperated again. She wanted now more than anything in the world to go to the country with Dietrich. "I was longing for this day—" her voice broke. She was suddenly near to tears.

"O Nona," he murmured.

"I wanted it."

It seemed impossible that Sylvus should be refusing her anything she wanted. That in itself moved her strongly to a sense of injustice and helplessness.

"Would it give you so much pleasure then—would it?"

"Yes," she said taking base advantage of his weakness at her evident disappointment. As she tried with all her might to make him change his mind, she felt less cruel, more tender to him. She came close to the bed, and laid her cheek against his hand. "Just this once, Sylvus. Of course I won't go if you don't want me to."

"You would n't, would you, Nona?"

"Of course not. And I promise you it will be

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the last time I'll go off with men; I'll reform to please you — there. But Mr. Dietrich will think it strange now that all the arrangements are made and everything if I don't go."

The victory was hers. He surrendered with a wistful sigh. "Go then — child. I — I did n't know it meant so much to you."

"It does n't, really." She had been given her way and no longer wanted it. "If you don't feel quite all right about it, I'll give it up." She felt chastened and magnanimous.

"I'm a foolish old husband," he said, fondling her hair. "No, go, dear. I daresay I'm wrong."

She lay quiet for a moment, then moved up on the bed so that she could kiss him. "Dear Sylvus."

She resolved that this would be her last escapade. When Dietrich left she would be very good and stay at home and care for Sylvus. She told him so, and he held tightly to her hand.

"You must sleep," she said at last, getting up from his bed. "I'm going to leave you now and undress. My corsets are tight, and it's late, or rather, early. I'll only have a few hours rest as it is. You'll be glad for me, dear, because I shall enjoy the country." She took the lamp and started out of the room, but after a backward glance, came to kiss him once more.

"Good night, dear, dear Sylvus."

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Then she went out almost reverently, impressed by his sweetness. Her last thought as she fell to sleep was of him.

“How gentle he is,” she murmured aloud, and sighed.

The country seemed very remote — so did Dietrich. The bed was deliciously cool. Her head ached. She buried it in the icy pillows.

“I wonder why he let me go. He could n’t really mind, then,” she thought drowsily.

CHAPTER XIII

THE day seemed to ally itself with Nona's plans. A winter sun, white and pale, lit cloudless skies, the air was like tasteless wine, the cold, a whip to the blood.

Early in the morning she was ready to go, dressed in a trim little tailor suit, simple hat and her thickest soled shoes. But she lingered in the room watching Sylvus finish his breakfast. There was tenderness and some gratitude for him, as she stood chatting, her eyes restlessly on the clock, so that she should not miss her appointment with Allen.

"I wish you were coming too," she said and really meant it.

The smell of coffee was heavily fragrant. It smelt of morning. The brown room where Sylvus always took his breakfast, looked clean and bright. Daphnis and Chloe were bathing. They clawed and twittered, shaking their sunny wings dry, and scraping their beaks on the yellow bars of their cage. Presently Daphnis began to sing in a high, hard, little pipe that soared to a point, impaled itself on the same note four times, trilled and

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chuckled in his throbbing, full-rounded throat, and descended musically.

Nona looked around the room, assuring herself that it was all as it should be.

"Petroff will come in then soon to play with you. He can stop to lunch if you want. I've ordered enough. And go to Richard's for tea. I'll be back well in time for dinner," she said.

"Don't bother about me, dear," answered Sylvus, gently. "I'll be all right. I hope you have a nice day."

"You dear!" She kissed him with sudden demonstrative impulse, adding, "You need n't tell Petroff or Richard where I am, will you, Sylvus? It's — none of their business."

She shoveled more coal on the fire, took the finished breakfast tray from the little table and carried it into the dining-room. When she came back Sylvus was already at the piano.

"I'm going to work more on that Suite of Bells I started last winter," he told her eagerly. "I've got the whole family of bells." He struck a few chords, imitating with marvelous accuracy the sound of a church bell.

"That's splendid," she said, drawing on her gloves.

"Some of the intervals are pretty hard, especially when the bells are cracked," he continued. "Here's

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a bell on the water. Listen, Nona. Here's the bell at night — their resonance is quite different."

"Yes, dear." She put a gloved hand on his shoulder, and stood reluctant to interrupt his enthusiasm.

"Do you know the central note of Joy, Nona? I think it's 'A' Major. That's what my Concerto begins in. It's a golden note to me." He did not seem to realize that she was ready to leave him.

"Dear," she said very gently, "I'm afraid I must go."

"Oh." His hands fell at once from the keys. "Oh, is it time already? There's a church bell ringing. It's keyed high. That means it's a fine, dry day. I'm glad. The country must be sad when it rains."

"Yes, it's a beautiful day. You won't be lonely?" She stooped to kiss him.

He sat motionless as if he were listening to the church bell. "No," he said slowly at last. "Come home when your happy day is over."

She reached the door now, but still lingered a moment, looking back. The morning light shone pale on his face and hair.

"You're *sure* you don't mind my going? You're sure?"

"Have a good time," he answered.

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Avoiding Antonin who was cleaning her room, she slipped down the hall and closed the door softly behind her.

The closing of a door is a definite thing, and usually brings with it some sensation either of regret or relief, renunciation or hope. To Nona it brought a vivid sense of freedom. Already she could hear piano notes behind the closed door. Sylvus was playing again. She ran lightly down the stairs out on the street.

The sky stretched above in even blue, the streets and houses seemed to have been dipped into its cool color. They also were blue and firm, giving an impression of solidity, as if held in their places by a great intake of breath, an invincible law of weight. She walked to the next corner, where she took a car. Her feet snapped crisply against the pavement, her cheeks bloomed to a frosted pink. She glanced at herself in the narrow mirror of a druggist's and was pleased at what she saw.

Allen Dietrich waited for her at the entrance of the Twenty-Third Street ferry to New Jersey. She waved her hand to him as she stepped down from the car, conscious of a distinct thrill of still another pleasure to the day. He was decidedly a charming and satisfactory man to be meeting. He too, seemed impregnated with the joy and sparkle of the day. As he strode forward to greet her, his

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step was elastic, his eyes clear, clean gray. The thin litheness of his figure suggested vigor. He carried a small lunch basket and warm overcoat on his arm, and a bunch of violets which he handed her at once. "There won't be any, where we are going," he said gaily.

"Violets? Thank you, but never give them to me again. You always do, and they mean good-bye to me, you know." She tucked them in her jacket. "But I won't be ungrateful. Tell me, am I late? Is that the lunch? Have you been waiting long? Oh, there's a ferry leaving. Let's run." She bombarded him with questions, racing forward as she talked.

They caught the boat. As its released chains clanked signal, whistles blew and the heavy ferry-boat crunched forward through blocks of ice. She gave a little sigh of pleasure. "I'm so glad we got this particular one. We would have had to have waited," she said.

There were very few people on the boat. Crossing the river she and Allen stood quite alone in the stern and watched the dock shrink smaller, stared at the giant-boned, flat-breasted skeletons whose millions of eyes kept perpetual guard over their birthright, and the smoky breath from chimneys, curling in thick, parched tongues which seemed to try and drink the blue of sky.

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"I feel young to-day," said Allen, and leaned against the rail beside her, his arm grazing hers. "I feel as young as I might have eighteen years ago. Aren't you a little afraid of me? I was a wild-headed boy."

"No, I'm not afraid of you," she laughed.

"I might for instance not bring you back again. I might carry you off in my arms somewhere."

"Out West, for instance."

"Anywhere," he said.

"You would n't go very far, because I'd bite and call for help."

"No, you would n't." His confidence was superb enough for its purpose. The phantom of a picture flashed across her mind, and fled, leaving her vaguely troubled.

She veered away from personalities and spoke instead of the country, of bright streams, red berries and frosted roads.

Allen had bought tickets for a place with a queer Dutch name. But they decided that after an hour's ride on the train, they would get off at the first station which chance offered. The hour sped by in a twinkling, timed by Allen's watch, and as luck suggested, the funniest, tiniest of stations became their destiny — a shed, a bench, a grocer's shop within stone's throw and a road leading away. They stood a moment looking about them. Nona

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stamped her feet in the cold, swung her arms and declared her nose must be red. Allen took firm hold of his basket, registered the name of the little station and informed himself from the gruff station-master what time the afternoon train was due for New Jersey. Then he started off at a man's pace, challenging her to follow.

Light was everywhere — the country a crucible melting yellow diamonds, the fields brass colored and ruddy. A wandering stream, half iced, tinkled like bits of glass over stones. Wind cut sharply across open spaces, bare trees stretched fine-etched, crooked fingers up to the blue, and a brown horizon line of hills rose and fell in dips. The road twisted like a playful ribbon, its coils mussed by the wind, tossed off over the hills.

Nona scampered ahead, her arms swinging, her breath a frosty cloud. "Isn't this wonderful? Why can't I *always* feel like this?" she gasped.

"Why can't you?" said Allen. "We're pagans here, and more natural in the part, I suspect, than back where we belong. By Jove!—" he drew a deep strong breath and squared his shoulders, "I'd forgotten how it felt to be free. Why do we allow ourselves to stay caught and glued in the sticky paste of law and order?"

"From you?" she cried, dancing about him gleefully.

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"I'm afraid you don't know me yet, little lady," he said. Here in the open, he was a different man. His faint cynicism of manner and weariness of face had gone. Nona, exuberant and young as she was, found herself overpowered and carried forward by the force and will of this man. He lifted her, as he would a child, over rough places in the road, his arm brushed her back commandingly when a country wagon trundled creakingly by; he chose the pace at which they walked.

"Your nose is red. Powder it," he told her once, and again, "Take off your veil. I like you better without it."

Soon what shine there could be to a winter's midday was on the wide fields and roads. He consulted his watch. "Lunch time," he announced.

"Yes, I'm hungry. Oh, look there—" she pointed. "I see a funny, sad, old house, with closed, rotting shutters, and a moldy porch. No one lives there. We'll picnic on the porch." She took his arm and dragged him towards it laughingly.

The feast was spread.

"I know nothing more poetic than to be hungry. Allen, what an Arcadian sense of fitness you have. I should n't have thought it," she declared, settling herself with a shoulder against one of the decaying pillars of the abandoned old house porch.

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"We'll freeze, but I'm sure there are bugs and rats inside, so I'd rather stay here."

He covered her shoulders with his overcoat. His arms as they ministered to her warmth, pressed her ever so slightly, but too slightly to warrant remonstrance.

"The lunch rhymes with the landscape," she laughed and clapped her hands. "Burgundy, extravagant man,—cold chicken, hard-boiled eggs and cheese — and what lovely plump oranges. I'm going to eat with my fingers. Why are there forks?"

He stretched himself out comfortably by her side.

"Aren't you cold?" She tried to offer him a flap of his coat.

"No, the Burgundy'll warm me — and you being near me, you hot-blooded little thing," he said, and touched her hand.

She drew away from him unaccountably nervous and troubled by his nearness and the tone of his voice. "No, no, that was n't in the bargain. Let's eat," she said hurriedly, cracking an egg shell. Then she dipped the smooth egg into salt and bit into its yellow heart.

"What sharp teeth," he said idly, and helped himself to red wine. "Here's to what you most desire, Nona."

"What I most desire?" her face grew thought-

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ful. "I don't believe I know." Involuntarily she snuggled deeper into the warm folds of the coat.

"I'll think of this day often when I'm out West," he said at last.

She put up a warning finger. "Don't. That's a forbidden subject to-day. To-morrow. . . ."

For a second his face drooped into its old, weary mask. "Who knows of to-morrow? There is no to-morrow — at least, there is n't when we die," he said.

"That seems a very sad and hopeless way of looking at it."

"On the contrary, it simplifies the problem."

"Have you ever been in love?" She crunched a chicken bone and stared at him with solemn eyes.

He took time to answer. "Never the '*grande passion*.' If it should get me now —"

"Well?"

"It would be bad business," he ended simply.

"What should you do?" she stopped eating and questioned.

"I'd have my own way." There was a thin, warning line of resolve to his lips. "I've never wanted anything enough to claim it, but if I did —"

She found herself waiting with restless curiosity for what he would say next, half hoping it would be something turned in her direction.

He looked at her, as if he divined what she

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herself would not have acknowledged — a feminine desire that what he said might be remotely and comfortably applied as a luxury to her secret vanity.

“Nona, my child, your eyes shine,” he whispered, putting out his hand, to which, this time, she yielded. His touch was cool and strong. She felt him pulling her gently towards him, and she wanted to lean the easiest way, the way of the suggestive pressure, to see what would be next to resist, to feel. But she was aware of a vague opposition to the appeal of his strength. She could not explain its counter warning, but it seemed part of an instinct. Then suddenly she wrenched away from him and sprang to her feet. He was smiling.

“Oh, no,” she cried, “oh, no,” and stood for a moment alone, her heart beating loud, her cheeks on fire.

“Just so, like a woman, when it comes right down to it,” he said enigmatically, and made no motion to follow her.

“It’s late,” she shivered. “There’s purple over there on the mountains where it was blue an hour ago. I’m cold. I think we’d better go.”

He sprang to his feet, formally solicitous. “Yes, we must go. Here, drink this wine.” He offered her the rest of the Burgundy, and kneeling, thrust the plates, forks and knives back into

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the basket. "Give me the glass when you've finished."

She did not look at him. When he had packed the basket, they stood silently side by side on the old porch, and stared out over the country. It had grown decidedly darker — the sky deepened its blue, the earth seemed to shrink and crack beneath its frost.

She still felt cold. "Come," she said, and they started through the thickening dusk. The wind was lulled, the road curled back, haze gathered and puckered among the bare branches of trees, there was a smell of burning wood. She noticed some berries darkening from red to black in the twilight, and going over to them, broke off a few clusters. As she did so her bunch of violets dropped, but she did not pick it up. They walked on in silence.

Finally she spoke. "What did you mean?"

"By what?"

"What you said the last, there on the porch — about 'women when it comes right down to it.'"

He took her arm roughly and stopped her in the middle of the road.

"Women will never pay for anything — that's all! even friendship."

"It is n't so," she cried hotly.

"Then kiss me."

"What do you *mean*?" She broke away from

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his clasp, and stood staring at him across growing shadows. "How *can* you?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and pulled at his mustache as if vexed at himself for having lost his control. "I beg your pardon." Then he stalked off ahead, without waiting for her.

She ran after him. "You've gone and spoiled our day," she almost sobbed.

Remembered landmarks loomed, the big, oak tree with its twisted body, the little, white house by the stream, the dog who barked.

"Why — why do you go so fast?" She was gasping, out of breath.

"I'm afraid we're very late," he said gravely.

"How — how late?"

"My watch has stopped."

Suddenly a shrill whistle ripped the air. It tore across the twilight with a thin, ugly sound, like something crying out in pain.

"The train — oh, dear," she murmured, and stopped running, holding her hand to her side.

Allen seized her arm. "Come along. We may do it yet." They stared at one another. In the shadows their faces shone out pale blurs. Between them rose an unspoken sense of something impending, a danger in the coming dark. Then they ran.

The berries dropped and were swallowed up in

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purple road blurs. Nona breathed hard, her heart thumped and caught in stitches and crooks, her feet ached, her nose and hands were numb with cold. Allen, his hand on her arm, pushed her forward. She was borne along, more by his will and speed than by her own efforts.

Again the sharp-edged shriek jabbed the silence. It sounded deliberately wicked and ominous.

"Around the curve," said Allen.

She made a last attempt to quicken her pace. But she was gasping with exhaustion. Her entire will had concentrated itself on catching that train. It seemed impossible that they should miss it. The little station shed came in sight around the bend of the road — light in the grocery shop beacons them. Like a long, glittering monster, the train panted and breathed.

"Wait!" shouted Allen hoarsely, and waved an arm.

The asthmatic engine puffed, thick smoke spread and twisted blackly away, the lights in each separate car twinkled. Suddenly in spite of his call, its bulk began to draw out of the station, with uneven groans and sighs. It paid no attention to Nona and Allen struggling desperately to reach it in time. The whistle, deafening now, sent weird signal into the distances. Mysterious, low-backed, soot-colored, the monster moved faster, its lights

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danced like devil's eyes — it showed a whisk of its retreating tail.

Nona leaned against Allen, struggling to get back her breath.

“What shall we do?” she said helplessly.

“There ’ll be another.”

“Of course, there will,” she wailed, “but we should have caught this one.”

The station-master was locking up to go home. He was hungry and cross, and little disposed to be pleasant to strangers. He told them curtly that the next train left in two hours and slouched off without tipping his cap.

“What *will* Sylvus do? He ’ll be worried to death. I promised to be home for dinner,” she murmured. She had not thought of Sylvus all day. Now suddenly she realized that he was waiting for her, and the thought gave her a quick, disagreeable twinge of conscience. She looked to Allen for suggestion and help, the scene on the road forgotten, everything forgotten except a miserable, forlorn sense of guilt at what she felt would cause pain to Sylvus, who had trusted her.

“Perhaps there ’s a telephone in the grocery,” he said. “Or if there ’s a carriage we can drive to another station. Don’t let yourself go this way, Nona.” His voice was kind.

Things happened slowly and were not encourag-

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ing. No carriages could be hired. A few idlers loafing in the grocery store stared curiously at Nona, but none would volunteer aid or information. Bribes did not tempt them. The fire spat and blazed in an old-fashioned grate. It was warm in the shop, no time to harness and go driving in the cold. They were all independent citizens and not the servants of these city people.

Fortunately there was a telephone, but it took endless time to get the connection. Allen stood with his back to the stove staring at the door. He had put his basket down near the counter. Nona, conscious of the loafers' stares, hung over the telephone, and entreated Central. Finally a familiar voice answered at the other end of the wire. It was Antonin, who at once began to scold. His disapproval stiffened the wires. Dinner would soon be ready, Mr. Leete was waiting for Madame. Why was she so late? At her bidding, reluctantly he called Sylvus to speak with her. It was a relief to hear Sylvus at last, but all of a sudden his voice seemed to have eyes fixed upon her. It was as if at that distance he could *see*, and she was afraid.

"Hello, Sylvus," she said.

He answered faintly.

"I'm sorry. I'm still in the country. We missed our train. I'll explain —"

"Oh, Nona," he said.

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“I'll be back in three hours. Don't worry.”

The connection was bad. There was a buzz of wires in which his voice sank and was lost. She listened and called anxiously. “Sylvus! Sylvus!” But no Sylvus answered, only a chaotic hum and buzz of wires.

Finally she hung up the receiver and turned to Allen.

CHAPTER XIV

SHE came near to him. "We can't stay here," she whispered. "It reeks of kerosene and cheap tobacco. Besides I hate these men." Behind her the huddled group of loafers chewed and shifted their heavy feet.

"You'll be too cold outside. We've a long time to wait, you know."

"I'd rather be cold than stay here."

She moved forward to the door and there was nothing for him to do but to follow her.

"Do you mind my smoking?"

"No."

"Was your husband worried about you?"

"No."

She opened the door and they stepped outside beyond the fringe of light. In spite of herself she shivered at the impact of cold air. He paused and looked down at her, frowning. "This is not wise."

"I don't care. Let's walk."

"You're tired."

"No, I'm not. Let's walk."

An impression of slight constraint fell over

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them. They were instinctively silent. She would have liked to have chattered, as if by peopling the moment with meaningless phrases, they might seem less alone, but his manner forbade false effort, and she was not sure that he would answer her, if she spoke to him.

It was a gray, quiet evening. From out the country hush, a great calm face, brave of feature, appeared to look and listen. The sky confused with winter stars, stretched away, unsolved, distant and cold. There was a poignant smell of dried leaves, roots, smoke and earth. The road wound off, flat, furtive, mantled in shadows.

Now as they walked on, a feeling of strangeness and unreality grew, spreading like water, at first shallow, then creeping higher, profound. It was a feeling which drowned the world of fields, washed away identities, merged and fused things by daylight niched apart. The countryside, and they two walking, and the night seemed fluid, swelling and subsiding in gleaming, cold waves, pierced only by star shine.

Nona shivered and drew up the collar of her jacket. A sense of pain and mystery deepened in her soul. Woven in a spell of night they were walking away into some secret — a secret which drew from them power of nerves and will. She surrendered to it as in a dream. Allen paced be-

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side her, a blurred shadow of himself, with strange, wavering lines.

Their footfalls cadenced on the frozen earth. Even such sound as they made rang strange and hollow, woven with country voices magnified — the crack of a dried bough in pain, the rustle of dust of leaves, the passage of a nocturnal bird, enormous, black, winging against the solemn sky. Now the little, white house of the sunny morning, flared homely, reassuring light from its window, turning a friendly face to the road. The smell of cooking vegetables, tangible almost in form, stalked forth like a host across the road, as if to bid the wanderers enter. Nona, attracted by the warmth of light, hesitated. A word from Allen and she would have knocked at the door. But he did not say that word.

His silence frightened her at last. She touched him timidly. "Allen!"

"You're cold?"

She nodded. All at once he put his arm around her. It seemed the natural thing for him to do, and she offered no opposition to him this time. They walked on. The little house appeared to trail after them a ways, as if following, then fell behind the road's curve. A dog barked sharply somewhere in the night.

His coat scraped against her cheek. She could not see his face. The grip of his arm tightened,

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crushed her in place to his side. As they walked now, they seemed to be but a single being, advancing into some vast center of revelation. Nothing near them but star points, half gloom, a curling road and space that offered no wall.

A great obedience fell upon them. They swayed, wavered and stood still. She could hear Allen breathing. The space seemed to widen, part and pass on either side of them. The night knotted itself poignantly where they stood, threw nets about them, gave them up to themselves, a center sharp and tense. Forces, like hooded live things, crept forward across the rolling fields and gathered close as if to listen. The touch of night, of the world, of Nature itself circled them impenetrably.

All at once, Allen bent like the branch of a tree in a terrible storm. He bent down and kissed her lips, his eyes half closed. She fluttered feebly a second and then was still. They swayed in one another's arms, his head bent over hers, trophies of Nature's will and might.

It seemed eternities before Allen spoke, his voice very low and tense. "I love you."

She whispered after him, as if learning a lesson, "I love you."

Then he released her and stepped back. They stared at one another, trying to pierce the darkness, their hands fallen to their sides.

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"It had to happen," he said, as if he were announcing something to an invisible, third person.

Nona was dazed. She put a hand up to her forehead, hid her eyes and still stood, swaying, alone. He went back to her and circled her with his arms once more, this time with the steady, protective gesture of a man who feels already ownership. "Nona, Nona, speak to me."

But she could neither speak nor think. There was something terrible, something hypnotic in the instinct which had swept them face to face in the night. Allen himself seemed in league with it, weak with it, yet stronger than she.

"You knew it must come," he said.

"Oh, why —"

It was as if she asked, not him, for answer to her cry, but Something else, Something vast and secretive.

"It's what you wanted." He put a hand under her cold little chin and lifted her face to his. "Was n't it, Nona?"

"Yes — yes," she murmured, but it did not seem she who was speaking.

He took from his pocket a small, silver flask. "Here, drink some of this." The strong stuff bit down her throat. Its fumes mounted to her head, and she felt gratefully warm.

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"Come, we must walk back. We can't afford to miss two trains."

He took her arm and turned her in the direction they had come. But at the idea of going back she shivered more than ever and did not want to go. The train, the journey home, what lay beyond, seemed unnecessary. After what had happened she felt that things ought to stop, she could not quite tell how. But there was nothing more to *be* or to *think*.

"Nona," he shook her gently, "Come."

She followed him through the night, back down the road for the second time. But instead of running as they had done earlier in the afternoon, now she clung to him, delaying his stride.

As they came near to the lights of the grocery store, he put his arms on her shoulders and wheeled her about facing him. "After this — you're mine!" he said. "Do you hear me, Nona — you're mine. You've wished it, or it would n't have been. I've wished it and it is." His fingers dug into her shoulders, hurting her. She gave a little cry and closed her eyes, feeling very helpless and cold.

"Come!" said Allen.

They walked slowly towards the warmth of the grocery store.

CHAPTER XV

SHE never knew how long they waited for the train. But when finally it puffed into the station, as if she were a child unable to care for herself, she allowed Allen to lift and put her upon it. It was a dreary journey back. There were dragging halts at every excuse of a station along the way. An obstreperous child howled with balked fury in its designs on a dirty bagful of candy, a couple of homely lovers lolled shamelessly and sleepily in an awkward, unsculptural pose on one of the red, plush-covered seats. The air in the car was fetid, the lights blinding; orange peels and nut shells, remains from some merry picnic, lay strewn over the aisle; the conductor shambled indifferently back and forth, his cap pulled over his eyes.

Nona sat very straight, making a pretense at staring out of the smoke-steamed window. She could see nothing but a very few lights that winked and were lost, and darkness which seemed to be rushing back from where they had come, faster in speed than the train's advance. Once in a while she turned

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and looked at Allen, meeting his gaze, compelling and strong upon her. He respected her silence for a while, then he began to talk to her. His voice was low and sounded as if in rhythm to the car wheels, bumping over rough rails. His lips were close to her ear. "You've done a terrible thing Nona in making me love you."

"I did n't *make* you love me."

"Little witch, did n't I fight against you? Was n't I even going —" he stopped abruptly and frowned.

All at once she felt as if he had taken entire possession of her will, as if it had been coming relentlessly to this for a long, long time. She looked at him wistfully. It was terrible, it was wicked, it was true. This man beside her with his strong-shaped hands ever so slightly square at the fingertips, the suggestion of his thin, muscular body beneath the well-cut clothes, his mouth which, since the moment he had kissed her, had somehow grown more frankly sensual, and his eyes no longer cynical and weary — this man had held her in his arms, had swept her to a confession which was a confession also to herself. Here was the result of her restless tampering with the unknown; here her brain, her nerves, curiosities and fine assurance had become as grains of dust to be blown aside. Noth-

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ing counted or weighed beside the madness of her surrender. He could talk to her as he chose, she must answer.

"Do you want me to go West, now?" he persisted.

"No, no," she whispered. It would be terrible if he went away and left her to remember. She saw no further than fear of being left alone.

"And if I *must* go?"

"No — no."

The train in one of its periodic stops slowed down, whistling and puffing.

"S — sh!" he warned. They sat quiet until the rumble of wheels on the rails again drowned their voices.

"Well — we'll think of that later. There's no need for a week or two to bother about it."

"What — what shall I do?" She spoke in such a low voice that he could hardly hear her. "What shall I do — when I get home?"

His face darkened, his hands went up to his mustache. She watched him pull at it thoughtfully, as men do sometimes when they are perplexed.

"Why, go on the same, dear."

"The same?" Her eyes widened and filled with tears. "The same, now this has happened? And — and Sylvus?"

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“Don’t cry, for God’s sake, Nona.” He leaned forward so that he screened her from the curiosity of the people opposite. “You can’t help it. It need n’t be any different — it can’t be, for his sake and yours. I don’t think of myself.”

A vision of Sylvus came to her, Sylvus more remote than ever, Sylvus playing, his eyes closed — and such pain shot to her heart, as could have wrung it with fingers of iron, squeezed the blood from it and left it dry. Again a sense of entire helplessness about what had happened made her sorry for herself. She was in the grip of a thing stronger than she could ever be. The very violence of that moment in the night was irrevocable, changing the whole meaning of her life. Allen could not say that there was no difference.

The train came to its final halt as a shock to her. She had not realized that she would have to get off it and begin to attack actively the return home. It was an enormous effort for her to drag herself on to the ferryboat.

The water and ice blocks looked secretive and menacing of dark cruel depths. City lights hung high and low, a dazzling world of glitter outlining harsh, giant bodies.

“No hiding place there,” she thought, and clung to Allen.

She would have lain quietly in his arms during the

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drive across the city, but he pushed her gently away from him.

"Some one might see us. Better be careful, sweetheart."

This idea heightened and startled her consciousness. They were no longer man and woman alone in the vast night space, facing one another with no one near to see or to interrupt. They were back from where they had started, with only themselves changed. There were eyes everywhere, dangerous, suspicious eyes, making wrong of what had happened, making them guilty people who must hide. She expected all at once to see many eyes upon them; Petroff's smiling, shining beneath a street lamp; Worden's surprised and angry; Laura's searching; Mrs. Mitchell's, eager. Only not Sylvus's eyes. Somehow the thought that Sylvus had no eyes was more terrifying than the others.

Allen took her cold, little, ungloved hand and held it in his. "Nona," his voice steadied her, "Nona, you must pull yourself together. You can't go back this way. I want you to be my brave woman. We're nearly there."

"Oh, Allen!"

"I'll see you to-morrow. We might have tea at the Plaza — or no — better not — too many people there. Meet me at the Brevoort at four."

The hansom clipped sharp around the corner of

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Stuyvesant Square, clattered down Second Avenue, and drew up at the corner house with a top-heavy slope backwards.

There was a light in the window, subdued by drawn curtains.

“Oh, he’s waiting,” she cried, suddenly agonized.

Allen lifted her down and they stood together in the shadow of the door. The church bell struck nine solemn tones.

“It is n’t too late,” she whispered.

He peered at her anxiously. “Can I trust you to be reasonable?” She gave a nervous, little laugh. “Yes, yes. You can.”

“Remember we both really wished it to happen. I’ll see you to-morrow. Good night, dear.” He bent and kissed her wrist and palm, his mustache brushing her hand.

She closed the door slowly and stood a moment, close up to it, breathless, listening. The hansom wheels rolled and horses’ hoofs clicked on the pavement, their beat growing fainter. Allen had disappeared into the night.

A carpet deadened her footfalls as she ran up the stairs. Only one more flight! All at once she leaned against the wall. Her head was whirling; she rubbed her hands against her lips. Then she dove into her little bag for her mirror and powder puff. Beneath the furtive flare of a gas jet, she

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bent over the mirror and powdered her nose. Her cheeks flamed hot and red, a bright glaze shone in her eyes, her hair fell softly over her ears and forehead. It seemed incredible to her that Sylvus would not notice the unnatural, feverish disorder of her face to-night.

She fought the fear of this with mechanical reasoning, summoning an image of him there before her on the stairs, and the image was of a blind man. Then slowly, she mounted the last flight and fumbled at the lock. The door opened immediately. Antonin, silent, sour-faced, stood to one side to let her pass. The sight of him brought her sharply to a sense of caution and reality — his rheumatically distorted shoulders, his white hair, the bend of his back, sounded the old note of a life which but a second before had frightened her. Now, it did not seem so terrible after all.

“Why do you stare like that?” she said, and brushing by him walked straight into the brown room. Sylvus stood by the door. She looked quickly at his eyes. In a second, as it were, he and the room claimed her back with indefinable familiarity and habit.

“Nona darling, I’m so relieved.” He groped his way towards her.

“I’m sorry, Sylvus. You should scold me.” She kissed him on the forehead.

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"How cold your hands are," he exclaimed. "Come near the fire. Antonin will bring you dinner."

She could not eat dinner there by the fire with Sylvus. She put her hands to her head, acting as if he could see. "It has been a long day. . . . I'm pretty tired, Sylvus, and all this bother of missing the train and everything has given me a bad headache. I think I'll go right to bed, instead of eating, if you don't mind."

His face fell and grew wistful. "That's too bad," he said. "I'd hoped you would tell me about the day. I've been very worried about you, Nona; I could hardly hear you over the telephone."

She wondered what would happen if she told him the truth. These lies came with strange facility, and the truth might be as easy to tell. But how his gentleness would shrivel! how the tears would fall from his blind eyes! What anguish there would be in his face! She stood irresolute by the fire, her head bent towards him, her hands behind her back. Then she said quietly. "No, the connection was bad. I was trying to tell you that we had lost our way — in the country — and when we found it, and the station . . . our train had gone."

"Dear me," he said. "Perhaps you went too far, Nona."

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"I guess we did," she answered lifelessly. "I'm sorry if you were worried, poor Sylvus."

"I have not been happy to-day," he said simply. "But I'm selfish, Nona dear. You were having a good time. That should have been enough for me." He waited eagerly, as if for a gentle word from her.

"You're not selfish," she said, and trailing over to the lamp sank the room into a pool of shadows, stirred fitfully by the firelight.

He listened to the faint rustle of her steps. "Have you put out the light, darling?"

"Yes," she peered through the shadows, and made her way slowly to the door. Once she stumbled over a chair, which she could have seen in the firelight had she been paying attention to what she was doing.

Sylvus had already reached the hall. "What was that?" he called, sensitive to her faint exclamation of annoyance.

"Nothing — will Antonin put you to bed?"

"Yes — oh, yes."

She walked with him to the door of his room. "What have *you* been doing all day?"

"I've worked," he said.

She was aware of a faint sensation of relief. If he had worked, he could not have been lonely. She kissed him again, called Antonin, and went

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quickly into her own room, which she entered with a distinct feeling of pleasure. The air was cool and fresh, suggesting recently closed windows, a fire in the grate blackened to coals, the gas was turned low. It was quite a large room and smelt faintly of her perfume. Rows of photographs covered its walls, a shining panoply of silver lit her dressing table, the wide, smooth patch of bed waited in the corner. There came to her the delicious freedom of a woman off guard, a luxury of animal self to be humored. Her plan of reliving the day when she should be alone, shaped itself vaguely. It seemed as if she must travel back an eternity to the beginning. There was nothing alive to remember except Allen's arms and lips.

She took down her long hair slowly. It hung like a flame. She loved brushing her hair. How violent Allen's embrace had been! This was what a man should be.

She sprinkled her neck and arms with perfume. His arms had been strong, his breath on her cheek intense. How could he ever say that it was *she* who had made him love her?

The light out, she slipped into bed as into a hiding-place. The dark swam with color and scents, a pulse in her head ticked. She wanted to arrange the order of things, to reason with herself. But

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there was no coherency or concentration in her thoughts. She felt too tired to think at all, and telling herself that to-morrow she would face the situation, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

NOW in a night the entire expression of life changed for her, became conscious at last of a definite excitement. It was a life constantly tense, more and more demanding. Days followed over which she seemed to have no control nor wish of control. The brown room remained the same quiet place, the faces around her were always those of habit, the ordinary business of living asserted claims, but beneath mechanical obedience to everyday detail, seethed a hidden life, urging its fever in her veins, turning her hot and cold at its whisper. She became resistless under the pressure and strange violence of this hidden life. It gave secret significance to her every gesture and thought, kept her quivering and high strung in a passion of expectancies.

There were meetings with Allen, more frequent every day — meetings which grew to be an intolerable nervous strain upon both of them, for they met in secret, conscious now of being seen together. The city became a large map over which they

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studied for hidden corners, spots unknown to their world, where they might escape gossip and prying eyes — corners in Harlem, restaurants lost in sly side streets, car lines, the subway, anywhere; everywhere discreet, watch in hand, wild beneath the restraint of strangers' eyes or, worse still, anxious to escape the attention of people who might know them, they dodged and slid and arranged time and place until their whole existence became like that of hunted criminals. These two, man and woman, alive with the warmth and intoxication of sudden, naked confession, under the necessity of being loyal to this confession, struggled recklessly for sight and touch of one another.

The times when Nona was not with Allen were almost unbearable. Her imagination, sensitive and awakened to definite direction, worked jealously. She wanted to know where he was every moment of the day and night. To this end she would telephone to his rooms or his clubs at impossible hours and refuse to leave her name if he were not there, until at last he forbade her to do this, as it was imprudent and uncomfortable for him. Yet the telephone was the means of many impromptu meetings. Stifled in a close booth, her eyes shining, her cheeks red, her heart thumping out of measure, she would whisper trembling appointments, advise him of hours unexpectedly free. It never occurred to her

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that he might be busy or have other arrangements which would be difficult to change. He usually came when she called.

When she left him after one of these prolonged hours in some isolated tea-room, the anguish of letting him turn away, wave his good-by and disappear in a cab or a car while she must retrace her steps back to the calm of an evening alone with Sylvus, the reaction which ensued, all engendered revolts in her spirit, kept her unquiet. Even the stolen, violent kisses given and taken in the shadows of lost streets or carriages, were so many aggravations to an apparently unsolvable problem, for she would not listen to Allen's suggestions of more satisfactory meetings. The fear was there and she could not conquer it entirely. Once she walked as far as his rooms only to turn back, convulsed and trembling like a young bird who has flown too far and sees an enemy waiting for it.

Allen, denied and postponed in his desire to be alone with her, grew fiercer with his wooing. She could not have chosen a better way to draw him towards her and keep him fast and tight. She had even forbidden him now to visit her at the apartment. She could not bear to have him touch Sylvus's hand. In consequence, unable to observe her home life, he grew jealous and brutal at the thought of possibilities, judged from his own ways

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with women. Poor, blind Sylvus was the cause of many scenes between them. Allen's pride roused itself and forced crises into an already untenable position.

Nona, a leaf in the wind, her senses a turmoil, her nerves tried to snapping, fought against his will and the fever of her own untutored desires. Sylvus's calm alternately irritated her or brought her to his feet repentant. If he had questioned her then, she might have told him the truth. But Sylvus did not question, although her state of mind was too sick and miserable to escape his sensitiveness. He grew silent and sad, his music itself grew sadder. He pretended to work at his Concerto, but she would often come upon him sitting near the piano, his head bowed in listless hands.

"He's dreaming," she would think.

One day he drew her to him, put his arms gently around her and stood so for a moment.

"Allen would be crazy if he could see me this way. He would be crazy!" was her thought, and she tried to go from him.

"Nona, my little Nona, I understand."

She stared at him, startled, a sudden lump of cold in her throat. Perhaps he knew it all, then; perhaps the instant of reckoning and explanations had come.

"I understand," he went on, his face raised and

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drawn to lines she had never seen before. "You're unhappy because — because of my infirmity."

"Sylvus — Sylvus," she cried, and a wave of relief swept her entire body, releasing her breath and tension of heart. "No, it is n't that."

He shook his head hopelessly. "You don't want to hurt me, dear. But I know you're not happy these days. I hear it in your voice."

She burst into a violent fit of weeping. Tears came that scorched her cheeks. She moaned as a dog or a child moans, throwing herself on the divan, her fingers digging into the cushions. The divan trembled with the helpless shake of her sobs. Then like a broken toy whose mechanism runs down in whirrs and uneven gasps, she calmed little by little to a great, tired silence, in which she could have lain forever. It was all too much for her to cope with.

Sylvus kneeling beside her, touched her hair and stroked the fever from her forehead, whispering tender words, incoherent himself in his distress. "You'll kill me if you cry that way, Nona — It's I who make you cry — Don't, my beautiful Nona."

She roused herself dully, the storm was finished, and she became conscious of his nearness. "No, it's not you, Sylvus." But now the crisis of nerves over, she became suddenly afraid that such loss of control might have betrayed her secret. The jeal-

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ous woman warned, grew cautious, petted and explained, until there was nothing left of the scene except an impression of an overwrought mood due to fatigue. It was easy to convince poor Sylvus of this. He was all eager to understand and help her.

"I'll play to you. Lie there, dear. Perhaps you'll sleep," he said. He played, while she lay with closed eyes and thought of Allen.

She governed herself more carefully before Sylvus after that, realizing a danger in the curious, psychic sensitiveness which seemed to make of him sometimes a man who might see deep into her troubled heart.

Yet there were two of whom she was more afraid than of him. These two, Laura Dunn and Richard Worden, from the moment Allen had come intimately into her life, went out of it insomuch as her confidence was concerned. Instinctively she mistrusted what their attitude in the affair would be, for they were both more devoted to Sylvus than to her, and she could most certainly not hope for their sympathy or approval in the present state of things. Indeed the menace of Allen's promise to Richard Worden became more urgent every day as a question which must be faced. Worden was not the type of man who could be cheated when it came to a promise made him; and there was no doubt about it,

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Allen had promised to go West in the very near future. Worden telephoned several times, and it was harder each time to answer his insistence satisfactorily.

One day Nona herself spoke of it to Allen. "What will you *do*?"

"Shall I go?"

She turned upon him quickly, hardly knowing what she had hoped he would answer. "You can't — you can't go. I should miss you so!"

"I am putting myself in a very unpleasant position for your sake," he reminded her, and she left him that afternoon with the worried consciousness that he was weighing the question gravely, and had not at all made up his mind to disappoint Worden.

The fear of losing Allen challenged her. She attacked him upon the subject again, the next time they were together. But at her rather insistent teasing, he showed an unexpected severity.

They were sitting in a small, stale, little tea-room on the West Side. The tea was bad, served in thick, white cups, the toast was tough and meanly buttered, the waitress unkempt, but it was a place where they were unlikely to meet any one they knew, and their tea once made, the waitress seemed to forget them. Allen stared at her across the table, with eyes grown colder.

"And if I don't go?" he said at last.

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"Why, we'll be together." She felt her answer insufficient, by the lack of response with which he received it.

"We'll have tea, I suppose, in places like this for the rest of the winter — we'll meet on street corners — we'll talk and talk, and then?"

She moved uncomfortably, her eyes pleading like those of a child.

But he did not feel inclined to spare her this time. "I don't know what you think I'm made of, Nona. If I don't go West, it means a reckoning with Worden, who's a good chap, and what else does it mean? I'm not your friend, I'm not anything else."

"But Allen —"

He leaned over the table and deliberately took her hand. "What does it mean to you to love me? I'm not a weak boy, my dear, to live on words."

"You make me very unhappy," she murmured.

For the sake of seeing him, of these stolen meetings, she would risk any scandal, but she was afraid of what lay beyond the stolen meetings, she was afraid of the problem he was forcing her now to face, the problem of *his* vanity, his rights. And she felt that he was unjust to be so relentlessly demanding.

"You've got to decide what this thing between us is going to be," he told her, as he left her that

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night. "You're driving me mad. . . . To know you're with *him*, and that I'm being made a fool of."

She lay awake for hours the same night, trying to argue the situation to some conclusion, but her mind twisted hopelessly around the same circle, finding no solution into which could be fitted, without tragedy, Sylvus, Allen and herself. She had to acknowledge an inexorable law of action, a progression of devouring forces, which refused to save intact the three of them. It became a question of the strongest will. The fear of losing Allen pushed him forward vitally. She envisaged vaguely the consequences of his remaining, hoping that things would arrange themselves in some way, which would be a compromise for all of them. Secretly she wished to keep Sylvus and Allen both in her life, and at the same time she did not want too much with which to reproach herself.

It ended in her avoiding issues until they should block her.

CHAPTER XVII

IT is the theory of eternal compromise which animates so many women's definitions of right and wrong, without the courage to proclaim one or the other a consistent profession of faith. There often comes a time, however, when circumstance, usually in the form of a man, shoves such women arrogantly in the direction he wishes them to go. Then, unless by a reflex action of feminine obstinacy, they resist his egoism with their own, they become victims of the man's definite will over right and wrong, and a man's will seldom accepts compromise.

Allen Dietrich, once roused, was a perfect example of the dominant male. He had lazed through the past twenty years, uninterested in any of the ordinary ambitions of his sex. Financial or romantic achievements had seemed rather tame and attainable to his calm assurance. He was cynical by nature and an egoist in practise. But beneath the deliberately accumulated ease of the rather blasé dilettante lay possibilities of tremendous energy and passion. For a very brief time these

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possibilities had stirred to answer Worden's vigorous utopianism, but that was before Nona's restless and challenging pursuit of him awakened finally the rage of the animal dormant, the rage which is really a need to conquer. Nona had tantalized him, had played with his senses too long. She had done more fatal mischief than this, she had made him love her, as a man of forty loves. In this love lived the egoism of the man. She could elude him in the final consequences of the situation, just so long, no longer.

Another two weeks passed, during which Nona's agitation of mind increased. She tangled herself badly in a maze of lies which sickened her. She lied to Sylvus about her plans for the afternoons; she lied to him about her more frequent fits of silence and nerves. Even so little taxed as she was by the blind man's faith, her ingenuity soon grew exhausted. Conscious of sordid deceit, she could not invent happenings and engagements in such abundant and unnatural detail as at first. Her imagination played when it played at all, not so much with Sylvus's credulity as with her own. She would have persuaded and convinced herself of excuse and reason for her lies.

Perhaps because of her wish to postpone reckoning, Sylvus's melancholy and old Antonin's gloom escaped her. She spent all the strength of her

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nerves in keeping Allen patient, and Allen each day grew less patient, more demanding. The question of his leaving for the West hung like a threat over their heads. Worden was beginning to become dangerously suspicious of the delay. At the end of two weeks he sent an imperative note to Allen requesting to see him at once.

Allen met Nona that afternoon at the Café Lafayette. They sat hidden in the back part of the restaurant behind the balustrade, overlooking the main room. The café was well filled with *apéritif*-sipping Frenchmen, who had found their way like homing birds to this only restaurant in New York which offered some of the leisurely Latin atmosphere of their beloved Paris. But in the restaurant itself there were few couples sitting at isolated tables and only enough waiters to prepare the place crisp and appetizing for the approaching dinner-hour. Nona and Allen were known at the Lafayette. A slight, carried-over protective warmth from the big French capital which covers so amiably many forms of romance, drifted here in subtle Gallic manifestations of sympathy. But unlike previous hours, when deliberately screened and safe, they had talked, Allen's hand occasionally finding hers on the table, this afternoon proved a tense and vital one, where Allen spoke as a man who may no longer be trifled with.

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"Here is this letter," he said, striking the envelope with an impatient hand. "I've got to see Worden to-morrow, and tell him if I'm going or not. If I'm going, it's got to be at once. Now Nona — what good reason can I give for not keeping my promise? Worden knows or suspects something already, I feel sure."

"Oh, I'm afraid of him," she whispered.

"There's no need to be *afraid*." He looked straight at her with mercilessly keen eyes. "But you must face the truth, Nona. If I go, it means good-by! I won't keep this business between us hanging on any longer. I can't."

"What shall we do?"

"For God's sake, face the thing, Nona. I'm not your friend — I'm not your lover. What am I? I'm in a false position all around. Did I, by coming into your life, change things between you and your husband? You've told me not. You've told me he does n't need you? Have n't you? Answer me — this is very serious."

She shivered, feeling suddenly caught in a hopeless net of truth and lies. Allen's eyes were piercingly upon her. He could see her cheeks grow red, then pale; he could see the doubt in her face. His nearness, his questions, the letter from Worden lying on the table, hurried and forced her to definite

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expression. It seemed as if nothing would wait and give her time to think.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"Yes." Her voice was low.

"Then you can't love Sylvus."

Her head began to ache — she picked nervously at the table cloth; her tea, cold and untasted, the toast grown soggy and lumpy, lay to one side. "No," she said desperately.

Allen leaned forward. "Nona, look at me. I'm mad for you — sick for you. I've never wanted a woman in my life as I want you. But I'm not a man who shares or who waits. You graceful, warm, hungry, little creature, I want to own you and nothing counts any more in the world but that — just *that*."

She breathed faintly, staring at him, as if hypnotized. Her cheeks were hot, red roses.

"But I will give up all thought of you," he went on slowly, "if you will not acknowledge my exclusive right to you. The only answer I may give Worden, if you love me, is to take you away with me. Otherwise I must go West — alone. It may be a caddish thing I'm doing. But you let me love you. I warned you in a thousand ways. You let me love you and I'm ready to play the cad for you — only you've got to pay me for that."

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“To pay?”

“You’ve got to decide, either to let me go or to come to me.” His voice had grown husky. It was the voice of all men since such things have been in the world — the voice of all men who have called women to them. “Think Nona,—think, my pretty, what I could teach you of life, the life you’ve been longing for. We’d travel — I’ll show you everything — I’ll let you live and look to your heart’s content. I’ll whirl you, and race you, through years of delight and love. I *can* love, Nona, better than a younger man.”

“Don’t, don’t talk like that, Allen.”

“Trust me, dearest one. Trust me. I’m offering what you’ve secretly dreamed of, what no blind man could give you.”

She shivered and put out a sudden, protesting hand. “Sylvus is too good for me — he’s too good.”

“Yes, he’s too good for you,” said Allen. “But I’m not. I’m your master. Do you feel it? And you *want* a master. Well, will you come? These things must happen at once, or not at all. I’ll throw Worden over, I’ll throw my friends over, my life here, my comparative respectability — everything, without a regret, for you. Will you go with me — away? Come! — we’ll sail to-mor-

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row, and leave worries and troubles behind us. We'll go to Paris. Does it please you?"

She shrank back in her chair. "I'm afraid — why do you ask me so suddenly? I must think."

"You've had time. You *should* have thought before," he said. "What have you been thinking of all this time, Nona?"

"I don't know — I did n't realize it would come to this," she said faintly.

"Well, here we are, as you've let us be. Here's the result. I've put off and put off going away because of you. What do you suppose Worden thinks of me? What do you suppose all these idle fools who've been giggling and gossiping about us think? Another vulgar little flirtation flickered out! And your husband? Can you take up your life again with him when I'm gone? If you love me, don't you see that you'll be living a lie with him?"

"Sylvus loves me."

"So do I."

"I can't leave him — I can't," she said miserably. The bottom of her world seemed to have dropped out. She felt obstinately passive, unable to acknowledge any change in the situation, or to cope with such a decision as Allen pressed upon her.

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"Then you've decided. We've had a few kisses, a few words of love and promises, a few tears, a hint that I'm a brute, and the story's told. Is that it?"

"Let me think."

"Will you come with me, to-night — to-morrow? Will you trust me? Think now."

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid of myself, of you — of Sylvus. What would he *do* if I left him?"

"He'd go on as he does now. From what I can see you're never with him."

"He would suffer."

"Won't I suffer?"

"What shall I *do*?"

"Come to me. Let me love you."

"I can't — oh, I can't — that way."

"Then there's nothing more to be said." His face grew iron-seamed, his mouth thinned to a straight line; he looked at her so coldly that he froze the tears in her eyes.

"Let's get away from here. There's nothing more to be said."

"Allen, let me think," she entreated, in an anguish of doubt and pain. She hardly knew now what she wanted, what miracle of solution she would have welcomed.

He was deliberately paying the bill. She could hear the clink of silver from his pocket book. She

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dared not look up while the waiter stood by and there was a silence until they were again alone.

"Come, we must go. I have several things I must attend to before I see Worden," he said distantly.

She stole a tear-dimmed glance at him. But the mask had dropped like a curtain over his face. He had become the baffling man of the world, slightly wearied and bored. As she looked at him he rose from his chair and stood, inviting her to do likewise. A waiter from the far end of the main room saw his motion and hurried officiously forward.

"Allen, don't leave me this way," she murmured. It seemed impossible that there was nothing more to be argued, that in one relentless move he had decided and forced her to decide a future which separated them. She could not believe that her destiny and his and Sylvus's was irrevocably settled.

The waiter stood behind her chair.

"Whenever you're ready," Allen said.

She stumbled to her feet, an instinct of decency and dignity choking back the aching impulse of tears. She tried to hold her head proudly, but she could hardly see where she was walking. As they passed the door of the café, with a mechanical effort she glanced in. At a table near by, sat Petroff and de Lalmes drinking absinthe. She would have

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avoided bowing, but Petroff said something quickly to the Frenchman, who looked around, and they both, half rising in their seats, bowed elaborately. Petroff smiled. Of course they saw Allen right behind her.

Once on the street, she turned to him. "You're being cruel."

"Will you come with me?" he asked gravely, meeting her eyes.

"Give me a little time."

"No, I must answer Worden to-morrow morning."

"Don't go, Allen. Don't go." She clung to his arm, reckless as to who might see them.

He disengaged himself gently. "They can see you from the window. Be careful."

"I don't care."

"You must care — now. And you must learn this lesson — that you cannot keep everything and not give. Nor can you compromise problems all your life. There's not room for two men and one woman to walk abreast. One must fall behind sooner or later. You've wished that third to be me. I accept. I'm going to say good-by. Hold on to yourself. Don't make a scandal." He spoke as he would to a child; emphasizing his words. Then smiling faintly, he took her hand and bent over it. "It might as well be here as around the corner.

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Adieu — never regret — and stick to your husband."

Before she could answer him, or cry out, he was gone, striding far up the street. She stared wildly after him.

It was growing dark and cold. A few of the men, sitting in the big window of the café, looked out at her. Then she moved away, her shoulders drooping, blind to where she was going, sick with a panic of loneliness. Now that Allen had gone, she wished that she had screamed and clung to him, promised him anything, only to keep him with her a little while longer. She could have wailed aloud, shameless in her pain and regret. He was hopelessly gone, swallowed by the night, lost in the streets which wound off in paths of shadow and bulging lights.

She began feeling that it had been her fault, and imagined more tragedy in his soul than ever could be in a man's soul; she imagined his contempt for her, his disappointment. His love, now she had given it up, appeared more desirable than the love of any man for any woman.

"Oh, why *did* I send him away?" she moaned aloud.

With her head bowed so that no one could see her eyes, she stumbled on up the street, unheeding of the hour or the direction.

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT evening Sylvus was to play a trio with Petroff and Santini. The concert began at eight o'clock and dinner had been ordered for half past six, but when old Antonin, with a long face, came to announce that it was ready, Nona had not yet returned. Richard Worden, who had been with Sylvus all afternoon, stayed on now, trying in his gruff, clumsy way to soothe the blind man's uneasiness at her delay. It would not do for Sylvus to be worried before the concert.

"Women are never on time," said the good Richard, adding under his breath, "D——n that woman!"

"Well, she *is* often late," admitted Sylvus. "I dare say she's met some one who's kept her."

"I dare say she has." Richard's scowl was no pleasant thing to behold.

"Shall Monsieur not eat his dinner? The little omelet grows cold," grumbled Antonin from the door. The old man looked solemn and lugubrious. His eyes blinking, his mouth drawn down thinly at

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the corners, his whole face expressing melancholy disapproval, he peered at the clock, which was ticking on past the dinner hour.

"Begin your omelet. She'll turn up." Richard pulled at his beard and frowned at Antonin.

"Yes, I'll begin." Sylvus walked slowly towards the dining-room.

But suddenly Richard stamped forward and planted himself before the blind man. "Look here! I can't stand this any longer. I've got to speak out."

Sylvus stood suddenly still, turning a startled face towards his friend. Then old Antonin hobbled behind him, and putting a finger up entreatingly to his lips, shook his head at Worden.

Richard cleared his throat and stared frowning at the old servant.

"Why don't you go on, Richard — what is it? — Tell me what it is that's troubling you. Is there anything I can do?" said Sylvus.

Worden, looking still at Antonin, saw great tears running silently down the furrows of his wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, pshaw! it's nothing after all. I'm getting to be a regular cry baby, with a few, idiotic worries of my own. Another time — we'll talk about them," he said gruffly.

"There's something you're hiding from me,"

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entreated Sylvus. "Tell me, dear old friend. Have n't I a right to share your worries?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, I tell you it's nothing at all. I've got to hurry off. See you later at the concert." He started toward the door pulling savagely at his beard.

"There's Nona!" cried Sylvus suddenly. "I hear a carriage."

The three men listened. There was a strange tension in the room, a second's lull. But the rattle of the carriage passed on and was lost in other muffled street sounds, and Sylvus, sighing, continued his gentle way to the dining-room. "She'll come soon. Good-by, Richard. Somehow I don't feel like playing to-night. I've never felt like this before."

"Yes, you do — of course you do. Come now, everything's all right . . . all right. Here, Antonin, help me on with my coat. See you later, Sylvus."

The big man stalked out into the hall, Antonin slowly following him.

"Monsieur, O Monsieur," he whispered cautiously, as he helped Richard on with his heavy coat. "I was afraid, to-night — Monsieur Sylvus has been so agitated all the day. Monsieur, if you only did know how my heart is sad at these things

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which go on. It was of Madame you had wished to speak, is it not so?"

Worden nodded.

Antonin came close to him, peering dolefully up into his face. "Of what good, Monsieur? Monsieur will pardon me, an old servant — but of what good to make my poor master suffer more than he does suffer? For things go not well — they go not well here."

"I know — I know. You were right, Antonin. But I'm going to take a hand in this business, I promise you." Richard went quickly out of the door and down the stairs, his face grown very choleric, nearly as red as his beard.

Coincidence may often lead direct to destiny. So coincidence, chance or Fate, call it anything one likes, is apt to narrow considerably the liberty of discreet comings and goings of those who wish for secretive circulation. If, for instance, Richard Worden on reaching the street, had turned to the right instead of to the left, he would have avoided meeting Nona. It happened, however, that at the precise moment when he chose the left, Nona was coming slowly home, her head sunk between her drooping shoulders.

She was by then tired and cold, unconscious of lights, noise and passers-by. She had been tramp-

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ing the streets wildly for the past hour, and in the very vague hope of meeting Allen, scrutinizing feverishly each masculine back and figure which resembled him in any remote way. Only a remaining sense of pride had prevented her telephoning, although the desire to do so had tormented her almost to the verge of yielding to it. Compromising even with chance, she had paced in front of one of his clubs, until for very shame she had desisted from such a humiliating exercise. A round, electric-lit clock, like a full moon, at last forced upon her sense of the hour. She remembered with sickness of soul, Sylvus and the concert and the actual necessity of returning home. Her mood was now one of sullen revolt.

Diplomatically speaking, it was not the time for her to meet Richard Worden. Yet they fairly bumped into one another around the corner, within sight of the old house.

Richard, recognizing her at once, seized her by the shoulder.

"Nona, what are you doing out alone at this hour?" His temper and voice were rough.

She gave a startled little cry at his touch and looked up. "Oh, you Richard? Yes, I'm late — I've got to hurry. Good-by," and tried to brush by him.

But he would not let her go. "Hold on, young

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lady. You're so late a few more moments won't count. And I've something to say to you."

"Don't be absurd. You're hurting me. Let me go, Richard. What's the *matter* with you? Sylvus will be worried," she said nervously.

The mention of Sylvus's name was like a match set to dynamite. The big man jerked her, facing him, as if she had been a disobedient child. "It's a pity you did n't think of that before. And that's what I've got to say—that and a few other things."

"How dare you hold me here this way—and what business is it of yours to interfere?" Now her pain, her disappointment and entire state of wretchedness turned savagely upon Worden. Her eyes showed hate for him; she twisted in the hold of his hands.

"I'm making it my business," he snorted. "Somebody's got to protect Sylvus and stop you making a fool of yourself."

"Oh, *you*—you fool!" she stormed, suddenly hysterical, stamping her foot and trying to pull away. "Let me go. You need n't protect Sylvus. I'm going back to him now."

Richard looked down at her sternly. "You're not going a step before you promise me—though the Lord knows what women's promises are worth—that you behave yourself and give up this busi-

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ness of trotting around with Allen Dietrich. Oh, I know all about it. You need n't stare at me like a wild cat. You've got to stop this nonsense, Nona. I'm Sylvus's best friend, and no cad like Dietrich —"

"How dare you say such a thing about Allen Dietrich?"

This side street, for the time, was fortunately deserted. Only the black shadow of the church and its blurred graves seemed to listen to the growing passion in Nona's voice.

"Never mind about him," said Richard curtly. "He's all I've called him in this affair. He and I have something to say to one another, too."

"You leave him alone!" In the turbulence of her resentment and anger, an obstinacy shaped itself — an obstinacy against telling this man what would silence him at once — that Allen was going away, that she had given up hope of ever seeing him again. But now she wished to battle with Richard. She felt suddenly as if she had not after all given up Allen, as if it were Richard who was trying to take him away from her.

"I can't waste time arguing with you, Nona, but I shall see that you behave from now on. Promise me to act square to Sylvus."

"I'll promise nothing," she cried.

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"Then to-morrow I'll tell Sylvus what's going on. I'll have to," he said grimly.

"Nothing *has* been going on."

"That's where you can't fool me, Nona. It'll about kill Sylvus, but he's got to know if you're going on at this rate. Oh, I don't say how *far* you've gone, but it's far enough anyway."

"Don't you *dare* tell Sylvus. You don't know — anything."

"I'll tell, if Dietrich does n't leave this town at once."

"Well, he won't leave, if I tell him not to," she blurted, tugging to be free from his grasp.

"He won't, won't he?" grunted Richard. "We'll see about that. I've got my eye on you now, Nona. If I can help it, you're not going to make Sylvus the laughing stock of your simpering, good-for-nothing, little world of gossips. He's not going to be ridiculed by men like Petroff —"

"Ah, Petroff —" cried Nona. "*Now* I see."

"Never mind about what you see. It is n't only Petroff who's been talking."

She had suddenly ceased to struggle. Her eyes gleamed at him through half-closed lids. "You can't afford to quarrel with Dietrich, my dear man."

"I guess whatever I had to do with him is finished," said Richard slowly.

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"What are you making such a martyr of Sylvus for? He's happy, isn't he?" she asked, in a voice which sounded vaguely ironical.

"Happy, when his wife leaves him all the time?"

"He does n't seem to need her."

"He certainly does n't need a woman like you."

"Oh, then," she said quickly. "You admit I'm not good enough for him. Perhaps he'd be happier without me!"

"For all you give him . . ."

"Yes, of the two miseries —" she murmured.

"Happier without you? What's all this stuff you're talking?" cried Richard, releasing her shoulder. "He certainly would be better off without you, if you're going on like this. If you were *my* wife, I'd make you mind me, I tell you that."

She stood still close to him. "What are you going to tell Allen Dietrich?"

"You leave that to me, and run on home now. I've said my say."

"Are you going to tell Sylvus?"

"I'll see about it."

"What have you to tell Sylvus after all? Nothing — nothing — nothing."

"I'll tell him that you've made yourself the talk of the town with another man."

"And what then?"

"Well — he can do as he wishes then."

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“ And you ’d *hurt* Sylvus — *hurt* him with that? ”

“ Before you get a chance to hurt him with something worse perhaps.”

She faced him, white and tense. “ I guess I could hurt him anyway in spite of you — always. Don’t you think so? ”

“ Should n’t wonder. Go on home.”

“ You ’ve made a great mistake to-night, meddling,” she said.

“ I ’d make it again, if I had to.”

He lifted his hat and strode off without another word. She stood watching the enormous breadth of his shoulders, and his long arms swinging away, his big head outlined a second in the glare of a street lamp.

It seemed to her as if with a clumsy sweep of his hand, he had aroused all her waywardness, had pulled down the problem again, and strewn it at her feet to be reconstructed. A passionate recklessness became hers. She tossed back her head and shrugged her shoulders. “ Hateful, meddling beast,” she murmured and went quickly into the house.

CHAPTER XIX

SYLVUS had finished his dinner. There was about the low-lit brown room in which he waited, an indefinable atmosphere of loneliness. He sat slightly hunched in a chair, his face hidden in his hands, an attitude become familiar to him; the clock seemed to tick slower and time dragged; the canaries were asleep in their corner; the vases like rows of odd-shaped, hooded penguins, turned their backs. From the kitchen drifted a faint sound of rattling dishes. Antonin was cleaning up.

Nona came so quietly that her key gave no signal in the lock. She tiptoed down the hall, and paused a moment on the threshold of the brown room. Standing there, looking over to Sylvus, she felt all of a sudden as if she held no longer a place in this room or his life; as if by fatality, destiny or whatever was pushing her so surely into the unknown, she had irretrievably lost her chance to be anything else but an outcast. Worden in his own, rough words, meaning well, no doubt, had revealed her to herself — a destructive influence sooner or later for Sylvus. Even Allen had said, "You must pay."

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Perhaps to pay for these terrible weeks of deception and cheating, she must risk being broken on the great wheel of adventure as it turned and made grist of dreams.

Now Sylvus moved and raised his head. "Nona," he whispered, and again, "Nona."

At once she came forward. "Here I am. I thought you were asleep."

"Nona, back at last. How *could* you be so late to-night when you know I'm playing?" He was very nervous and febrile, his fingers twitched, a faint line marked the usual mildness of his forehead.

"I'm sorry."

"Even Richard noticed it," he went on. "I really think, dear, that lately you're exaggerating a little this staying out so late."

"I'm sorry." She seemed to be unable to say anything else.

"What time *is it?* We must leave in a few minutes, and you've had no dinner. Call Antonin."

"I'm — not going — with you to-night, Sylvus. I'm — too worn out. Antonin can take you. Do you mind?"

"Not going with me? Why, Nona — are you ill? Tell me quickly, are you ill?" He rose from his chair and groped his way toward her until he touched her hand. "You're like ice, child. What's

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the matter with you? I know there's something."

"Dear Sylvus — nothing at all — nothing really. Only I'm tired — I'm tired, and one of my headaches, you know — neuralgia — is coming on."

"How can you upset me so when I must play, Nona. I'll play badly. Tell me the truth. You *are* ill?"

"Nothing of the kind. Listen to me. Go with Antonin and don't be worried. I — I may come later, if I'm rested."

"Your heart's beating quickly, Nona. I can feel it."

"I ran to get here."

"Your voice sounds strange. I won't leave you. I won't play to-night."

"You've *got* to go, Sylvus. Don't be silly. I've had these headaches before and I'd rather be alone."

Just then Antonin appeared at the door with Sylvus's coat and soft-brimmed hat. "Ah, Madame is at last arrived," he said sourly. "There is a bit of cold chicken and salad waiting for Madame. Will she eat of it before she goes?"

"I'm not hungry. I was telling Monsieur, Antonin, that you are to go with him to-night. I have a bad headache."

"Madame is not going?"

"No."

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"It is not good what you do there, Madame," said the old servant indignantly, "to send Monsieur alone."

"Oh, will everybody leave me?" she said wearily. "Don't *you* begin, Antonin. Do you want me to go, Sylvus, when I'm so tired?"

"No, of course not," he answered hastily. "Give me my coat and hat, Antonin — and my violins. You'll be better when I come back, won't you? Will you be awake?"

"I'll be awake — oh, yes, but have Antonin come in with you. Do you hear me, Sylvus? Have him bring you in, in case I should n't be — awake."

Antonin helped his master on with his coat, muttering angrily. "And my poor bones to-night. I am good for nothing with this rheumatism."

She went swiftly over to Sylvus who stood tall and gaunt near the door. Putting her arms around his neck, she kissed him. "Good-by, dear Sylvus. Play well. Good-by." There was a great sadness in her voice, almost a note of appeal. "Good-by, Sylvus," she said again, lingering over the words, as if they held a secret that she longed to explain.

"Nona, how strange your voice is! Let me stay with you. I don't feel happy about leaving you."

But she pushed him gently from her. "You imagine. Good-by, dear. Take good care of him, Antonin."

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He went, leaning heavily on the faithful old man's arm. He went sadly, slowly. The door closed and she was alone.

"Oh! — oh!" she moaned aloud, and put her hands to her eyes. The room seemed to breathe more faintly. There heavy and close in the air floated her life with Sylvus — the ghosts which had peopled it; here like shapes of melody were notes anguishingly sweet of his music, troops of them born blind; here memories of his voice, gentle and mild, the essence of many flowers which had bloomed and died, the clinging perfume of burnt incense, the warmth of lit fires in the old-fashioned grate; here was his chair, his vases, the piano still opened.

"I can't, I can't," she cried again. But she had known all along that she would, even when she sent Allen away hours ago, even when she had met Richard. What was the truth? To what type of life could she be faithful? That was the question. She was sure of herself in nothing, so the only way to do seemed to accept as final the extreme of decisions. After all, life without touch and sight and emotion was a poor thing. Some women were born to be saints, others, mistresses. She was neither — as yet, and despising herself for a weakling, she resolved to cheat her own fears.

Walking over to the mirror, she stared into it.

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"Yes, I'm fit for Allen, not for Sylvus," she thought, and there was reverence for Sylvus in the comparison. Mercilessly she questioned the auburn of her hair, red of her lips, green of her troubled eyes, the full whiteness of her throat — mercilessly she read in the seduction of her features, hunger of the unknown. There was a gray mist in her eyes which she could not understand — it was a mist hiding her soul — it gave her pain and made her face more beautiful.

Then deliberately she turned from the mirror and walked to the telephone. Its bell jangled, discordant, shockingly loud. She asked for the number of Allen's rooms. While she waited, she did not think. Everything seemed suspended, held over until she should speak with him. It never occurred to her that he might not be at home.

"Hello!" His voice sounded close to her ear.

"Allen," she called, "it's me, Nona."

"Nona, what is it? What has happened?"

"Allen — I've changed my mind — I'm coming with you." The words tumbled childishly, inadequate and incoherent, into the mouthpiece of the telephone. She was clinging to the wall, flattened against it, the receiver pressed tight to her ear.

"Speak more distinctly — for God's sake, what does this mean?"

"What you wanted — I want to go away with

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you — I want to go — to-night. I must go right away —”

“Has your husband — does he *know*?”

“Nothing — nothing — I — I’ll tell you later —”

“You mean this thing?”

“Yes.” She whispered it.

“Wait — wait a moment — let me think.” It was he, now, who wished to think.

She shivered and began to cry feebly to herself, afraid alone in the apartment, afraid of what she was doing.

But his voice, quick and tense, sounded again in her ear. “Are you alone? Where are you telephoning from?”

“The apartment. Yes. I’m alone.”

“For how long?”

“For about two hours.”

“Listen carefully to me, Nona. There’s a steamer sailing for Cherbourg early in the morning. I happen to know. We’ll board her to-night. I’ll telephone and arrange. Pack your trunk, no more than you need — I’ll come for you — let me see, in an hour?”

“No, no, don’t come here.”

“I *must*. You can’t come to me at this hour — alone, in your state of mind.”

“Don’t come here.”

“I’ll wait in the motor downstairs and send a

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man up for your trunk — it must be that way — my brave Nona — I'm dazed with it all — you won't be sorry — I'll love you so."

"Hush," she whispered, "not now."

"Yes, yes, you're right — later! Be ready. It's half-past eight now — in an hour."

"Yes."

"Good-by, my Nona."

"Allen, will you do something — rather strange . . . for me?"

"What is it? Quick, dear, there is n't so much time to lose."

"On your way, stop and — buy a bunch of violets. Have the man bring them up to me."

"What on earth — ?"

"Please!"

"Anything you want, sweetheart — anything."

"Good-by." She hung up the receiver.

The hall looked very empty. A board creaked somewhere, a door groaned, some one on the floor above was hammering, and it was as if he were hammering nails into her head. The clock seemed to tick faster than it had ever done before, its monotonous reiteration almost drowning the pounding upstairs. It meant that she had just an hour in which to do many things. No time to think — no time to think.

"I can't do it," she whispered.

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"You've *got* to, now," answered the clock.

Already she was on her way to the small store-room at the end of the hall. This room had been planned originally for a servant, but Antonin had wished to stay on in the little French boarding-house which had been his home when he first landed in New York, and Nona was only too glad of the extra floor space for trunks and odds and ends. The gas cast weird shadows into its stuffy corners, as she opened the door, and stood on its threshold a second, afraid of its gloom, of the hunch-backed, silent piles of trunks and musty smell. A long stick crowned with crumpled, paper roses and trimmed with gilt ribbon, an old cotillion favor, as if startled at her invasion, fell clattering to a crazy angle between a bag and a trunk, barring entrance. A faded sun-bonnet hung limp from rusty hook; on the upper shelves mummied packages were laid away like rows of dead.

Nona's own neat, little leather trunk fortunately stood near the door, in a not too encumbered position, and her valise perched within reach. She went after that first, climbing perilously on top of a wooden box. Then she tugged at the trunk. Her hands were by this time black with dust, she tore her skirt on a nail and scratched her arm. But she managed to pull the trunk out into the hall and stopped to rest, leaning against the door. The

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physical exertion of getting these things into her room allowed her no leisure to think.

Her room was cool and sweet, ready for the night. At an impatient twist, the gas blazed high to a wide fan flame, hissing at the tax on its light. She turned it lower, beginning to talk aloud and moving restlessly, flinging open her closet doors, as a burglar might with limited time to act.

“Let me see — what must I take for the steamer — and later — two piles — all my veils and gloves — Here ’s a thick veil — that ’s good — now shoes — my traveling coat — my silk stockings, a dress for the evenings — will they all fit into that bag?”

She threw everything feverishly on the bed in two mounds of limp color, exhaling sachet. They fell like murdered things, tortured shapes; gloves and scarfs in serpent coils peered from folds of chiffon gowns and ribboned lingerie. The whole grew to a soft disorder, a jumbled scale of color, scattered and chaotic, mutely decorative.

In a rage of hurry she tossed these things familiarly, juggled with them, three and four at a time. Now on her knees patting, pulling, coaxing miracles from the small allotted space of trunk and valise, now standing above the bed, throwing its burdens in every direction. Next she clawed her hats down from the top shelf of her closet — her traveling hat box was in the closet. She fetched

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it out, pinned, wedged and planned until that too was finished. Then she took a ring of keys from a table drawer, locked the trunk and hat box and attacked the last details of bottles, powder, soap and jewels to go into her valise. These she lingered over, touching them with light, practised hands.

It seemed almost as if she were tearing them from their roots, so accustomed was their place on her pretty dressing-table. Only when they had been also tucked away did the room begin to look forlorn and denuded.

Last of all she sorted the jewelry with trembling fingers. There was little of it, for she had never cared about gems. She laid aside on the dressing-table a simple pearl ring that Sylvus had given her, and after staring at her wedding ring, she slipped that softly from its place, kissed it and put it beside the pearl, rubbing the mark it left on her finger.

The valise, too, was locked. A dress and wrap which she had not been able to crowd into the trunk lay abandoned across the bed; the open closets, thinned by her choice, still showed long skeletons of discarded chiffons; a broken fan had fallen near the door.

Then she went to her little mahogany desk and wrote a note to Sylvus. "It's the thing to do," she murmured. "Somebody will read it to him, probably Antonin." Suddenly she flung herself

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from the chair. "Oh, how cruel it is — how cruel!" she cried passionately. "Is it possible it's *me* doing all this?"

There arose the vision of Sylvus coming home after his concert. She saw him walking to her, his arms outstretched, then the anguish and unbelief of finding her gone — it was terrible to think that he would have to suffer. If she stayed he would suffer, too; perhaps even worse than if she went out of his life now, definitely, and left him free with his genius.

Then she remembered the flying tick of the clock. No, she would not change her mind again. She would be true for once to a decision. She snatched up a hat and veil and began with shaking fingers pinning them on. She was looking into her mirror for the last time. It seemed strange, as hard to realize as dying and not going on after death the same way. This mirror had reflected her in many moods. It saw her now with eyes lit to points of fire, and cheeks too pale.

For the last time, she stood and looked around her. The photographs on the wall stared back, as if they had been watching her while she packed. Some of them seemed amused. One woman was laughing, others turned dismal profiles. Laura Dunn's picture was among them. Nona looked at it longer than at the others. It was a profile,

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strong, beautiful and controlled. There were photographs of Sylvus, too, with and without his violin.

The door bell rang twice, loud crisp rings and then was still.

She stood listening and trembling. "If it should n't be he — if it should n't!" she whispered. It rang again, this time impatiently. Then she hurried to the door, her heart choking in her throat.

A burly cabman, reeking of cheap tobacco, his nose half hidden in a muffler, stood there, holding gingerly a bunch of violets.

"Good even', Ma'am," he said huskily. "Are you the party the gentleman's waitin' for?"

She held out her hand for the violets, and led the way to her room. She could hear the man's wheezing breath as he creaked after her.

"'Tain't much to carry," he said taking hold of the trunk with capable hands. "The gentleman's took my keb for the trunks. He's got a machine, awaitin' for you."

He lifted the trunk on his thick shoulders, and, his head bent, made his way back to the hall. "Another trip'll do the job." He left the front door open. Nona standing in the hall heard his heavy breathing grow less, as he went down the stairs.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she cried, "I've got to go."

With the note and violets in her hand, she went

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into the brown room, stared around it, and finally laid them on the piano. "He'll find them there."

The man was back now, carrying off the valise and hat box. "I'll be down in a moment," she called after him.

It was as if all that past hour she had been drugged, insensible to what she was doing. Now slowly a fringe of pain was beginning to crawl around the daze of her mind. The longer she stayed in the brown room, the more intolerable would be the pain.

She caught her hand bag and gloves, gave a last startled look about her and ran—ran as if she were escaping a danger.

The door closed. Behind it the gas in the hall, in her room, blazed; the lamp turned low in the brown room gave shadows.

She ran down the stairs, out upon the street.

Allen was there. He caught her hand and pulled her into the motor. She felt his arms around her, his lips against her veil. He smothered and hurt her in a passion of greeting. She lay in his arms shivering and shivering.

The motor buzzed down the street and away as the church clock struck half past ten.

CHAPTER XX

SYLVUS mounted the stairs in a dispirited way, leaning on Antonin's arm. The old servant wheezed and moaned as he climbed. His rheumatism was worse and giving him great pain.

"You're going to open the door, leave me in the hall, and go straight to bed," said Sylvus gently. "I can tell you're having one of your bad spells to-night. I don't think Madame will be asleep yet."

"Oh, Monsieur is good. *Cette sacrée épaule!* It is with difficulty that I move. Ah! but age speaks! It is not long that I may yet be of service," mumbled Antonin.

"Madame won't mind my disturbing her, I'm sure, even if she's asleep, when I tell her why I sent you home."

Arrived at the door, Antonin, bending painfully, put down the big violin case and fumbled for the key. "*Aï, Aï*, my poor back. Monsieur will be well, if I leave him here?"

"*Voyons*, once in my own hall, I know my way as if I could see," said Sylvus.

"Ah, Monsieur, there is light. The door of

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Madame's room is closed. She is without doubt there. Shall I not call her?"

"No, I'll go to her. Good night, Antonin, don't wait. Give me my violins."

"*Bonsoir, Monsieur.*" The old servant shut the door and shambled off, grimacing with pain, his shoulders twisted and aching.

Sylvus was alone in the apartment, as Nona had been alone only a short while ago. The last, sharp sound of the closing door at her going had subsided to this silence which left no trace, no foot-fall nor betrayal. Falsely quiet, the hall and rooms lay hushed in gas and lamp-light. Daphnis and Chloe, the canaries, slept.

He put down the violin case, and feeling his way, tiptoed to Nona's door, at which he very gently knocked. There was no answer. She must be asleep, he thought. He would only kiss her good night and make his way to bed alone.

He opened the door with infinite precaution. Here in this room, disheveled and abandoned by its owner, he did not know his way about so well, and advanced, hardly daring to breathe, arms out, fingers feeling for treacherous obstacles. Once he kicked a pair of forgotten shoes and stopped quickly at the slight noise they made.

"Nona, did I disturb you?"

There was no answer. Suddenly he bumped hard

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against the open closet door. "Oh, what's that?" he cried and put a hand to his forehead. "Nona, I'm sorry. I guess I must wake you. I'm lost in your room." He laughed ruefully, rubbing his head.

But there was still no answer.

"Nona, are n't you awake yet? — why don't you answer me?"

He felt on forward, his senses sharpened in the silence, his tall, gaunt body bent to a strain of listening. "How you sleep!" he said. All at once he reached the bed, hitting his knees on its edge.

"Nona," he called, and felt for her.

The sheets were rumpled, the dress and wrap, left behind, lay limp across the pillow. At the discovery of their soft, resistless folds Sylvus grew afraid. His fingers now flew and crawled, exploring the covers. He fell half over the bed, feeling out like a drowning man with arms and hands which thrashed its surface. The chiffon dress slid to the floor and its skirt tangled around his feet, as he scrambled up from the bed. He stood swaying, then wrenching himself free, plunged forward, crying aloud, his face upturned and terrible, a mask of fear.

"Nona!" his voice rang wild and anxious through the empty space. At last he reached the door and groped his way to the brown room.

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"Where are you — my God, where are you, Nona?"

The spirit behind his eyes, poor, crippled light, struggled and beat broken wings against the darkness. He strained hopelessly in a maze of panic which misted and lost instinct of direction, no longer knowing his way or in which room he was. His hands hit at the walls, he turned in circles like a trapped animal in a hole. Once he stopped short, concentrated on a suspended breath of listening, until the pressure of the silence became too terrific to bear. "I'll hear her breathe, perhaps, or feel her. Suppose she's fallen and fainted and I can't get to her! Nona!" He sent an agonized wail again into the unresponding stillness.

The brown room with its drugging, thick air of heat and incense and flowers, its clouds of silence closing around him, seemed opaque and resistant as a wall against which he might bruise his body, if he moved. The clock ticked. His hearing centered upon it; he counted. If it would only strike, he would at least know the hour; for he had lost track of time. But like a swift pulse throbbing on mercilessly, it told of unrecorded passing, clipped off seconds of mystery. Daphnis, the canary, moved and fluttered a wing in her sleep. He heard and tried to follow the sound, faint as it was.

Then in a last desperate attempt to find Nona, he

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sank suddenly on his hands and knees and crept, feeling the floor, his head down, like a dog who hunts a trail. He made his way in this painful fashion around the whole apartment, groping at the legs of chairs and tables, exploring with pitiful, eager fingers every inch of ground. If Nona had fainted and was lying anywhere helpless, he would find her. Down the hall he went, into her room, and back at last to the brown room after a sick unavailing search. His knees ached and had stiffened, his hands were sore, his face haggard. He staggered to his feet and stood swaying. Nona was not there; she was not in the apartment. He was sure it was too late for her to be out alone.

"If I could only see," he moaned aloud. "Perhaps there is some message. If I could only see!"

He was standing in the corner of the room near the shelf which held the collection of vases. Suddenly with an impotent gesture, he thrust out his arm, caught in its sweep a vase which stood on the edge of the shelf and knocked it over with a horrid crash of breaking pottery on a polished floor. The noise shivered the silence into quick, sharp bits of divided sound that seemed to spread and scatter into hollow space before all was still again.

"Oh, my God — what have I done?" he screamed.

Down on his hands and knees once more, he in-

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vestigated and found the pieces of one of his beloved vases. The fear in his soul now was giant. Eyelids open showed the lifeless blind of his eyes, terrible in their enforced expressionlessness. Erect, quivering, his arms out from his sides, he took the outlines of a cross. So he stumbled forward not knowing where he was going.

The clock ticking on as if it were chuckling mirthlessly to itself, came to an hour and struck "one — two — three —" Sylvus counted. "Four — five — six." It would never stop. Twelve tones and then the rapid tic-tac of its race forward to another hour.

Exhausted and conquered he would have fallen, had he not clutched for the first support near him, which proved to be the piano. He clung to it like a shipwrecked man. His hands obeying habit, sank to the keys. There they touched the flowers left by Nona. Strange messages sometimes, presentiments of messages, abide in inanimate things, and speaking and living for those who hold them, become happy or tragic suggestions to the instinct. Sylvus felt first the flowers. It almost seemed as if they had called him and pointed to the letter next them. These two, the violets and the envelope containing Nona's scribbled and incoherent good-by, once clasped in the blind man's hands, mute and poignant in their meaning, strove to tell him why

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they were there. The night around him, the silence, the smell of fading flowers and the impenetrable secret of a letter he could not read, all these things stung and drove him mad. His poor, bewildered brain, shaken to distracted work, racked itself for explanations of his trouble. Nona hated violets — they meant unpleasant things to her — she called them Good-by flowers. He *knew* these violets and this letter came from her, and knowing, felt disaster.

He must think, he must reason, he must have help at once or he would die of the torture and uncertainty surrounding him in close, smothering wings.

There was only one being he could call, one friend whom he should have called at once, who could disentangle the wretched mystery of this tragic homecoming. His bewildered mind formulated the name of Richard Worden. But how to get him, how to call him! By a violent effort of control and will, he remembered the telephone and Richard's number. Now all that remained of strength and power to move directed itself to the task of reaching the telephone. He reeled forward like a drunken man, the violets and the letter clutched to his breast. The way seemed interminable, a road no longer familiar. A pitiless obscurity clogged and thickened his way. He clung to walls and

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chairs and all the propping things he passed, until after, it might have been eternities, he found the telephone. He could just give Richard's number to Central and wait, leaning against the wall.

But when the sculptor's voice sounded gruff answer, he had only breath enough to whisper back.

"This is Sylvus — Nona's missing — I'm alone! — can't find —" Then his voice gave out. He slid to the ground, still holding the violets; the letter falling, fluttered to a distance. Alone on the floor by the telephone he had fainted.

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Later Richard Worden with a shove of his mighty shoulders, broke the front door and rushed in to find him there, waiting, unconscious.

CHAPTER XXI

NONA was free, bound for Paris on a big German liner which rode the sea beneath wide skies, with beyond an horizon edge never pricked by the steamer's prow. Here she and Allen were strangers among strangers, two of the muffled bundles in the long lines of steamer chairs; two who paced the decks arm in arm, or sat at their small corner table in the dining saloon, smiling at one another over Allen's generous orders of champagne. The rest of the passengers were an unimportant lot, with exaggerated profiles and nasal voices, easily dismissed from consideration.

"Nothing but Jews. Does n't your nose feel nice?" she had remarked to Allen the first day out. There remained registered impressions, figures and sounds which long afterwards loomed as indistinct backgrounds to more poignant memories. From the beginning these impressions even were unreal, shadowy lantern-slides of quiet-footed sailors padding across wet decks lashed by March winds; noises and odors which during the seven-days' trip accompanied her thoughts; the creak of uneasy

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wood; muffled pant of engines working in the ship's entrails, so that slowly they might advance towards a not yet visible shore; and the smell of tar and damp and food. These were first days of brilliant and vivid surrender, days which transformed her into a glowing, splendid creature, reckless of all left behind, living moments passionately at Allen's bidding, flaming in an awakened consciousness of the primitive egoism hidden in this man, whose daring love made her feel young and wise.

Her vision demanded the romantic. She gathered to it as realities only Allen, the sea and the nights. In the great silence of nights, when sky and sea closed around them like screens, it seemed to her as if the rich thrill of being alone with him was almost too sharp for the beat of her wild heart. Her fancy often suggested stealing up on the decks after dark. In a deserted corner, with the mist driving salt in her face, her hair blowing fierce and red in tumultuous disarray, she would stand, sheltered by Allen's arm, and peer out at the moving sea shadows, her whole being aching under the spell of giving so much to him. Then a sad happiness, elusive in its touch, would tiptoe close and breathe to her inner hearing delicate messages of mystery and pain, causing her to sense dimly a truth beyond Allen's lessons, a truth of which she was almost afraid, so much bigger did it seem than he

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or she. She would try to tell him about these things, but he would only smile indulgently and hold her closer to him without other answer.

So looking into the night, at the flowering stars and vast empty spaces of blue, or if there were no stars, at the black sea she would tell herself that this must be the great revelation and fulfilment of her destiny, and she would ask in a small, breathless voice, "Will you always care — this way?"

It was as if it were above all strength she worshiped. She loved Allen because he was tall and *svelte* with arms of steel and eyes which pierced her occasional withdrawals from his mastery — eyes always upon her, jealous, demanding as Sylvus's had never been.

"Allen, look at me," she would whisper. "Look at me the way you care."

But after Allen, she loved the sea because it was stronger than he. Leaning far over the rail, her chin resting on her hands, she would stare out by the hour, as Allen stared at her, with eyes half-shut and a gleam in them. She grew to know its sea moods, the strange green shift to the water, treacherous when it was smooth and silky, cruel when it tossed its locks to the winds, showed its teeth and frothed with rage against the sides of the ship. It stretched away, sometimes, in slippery,

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oily curves; at other times it bit and clawed at a dirty, gray sky pressed tight over the tips of the steamer's masts. Mermaids and fish and drowned people swayed at the seaweed bottom, and there was no hole nor glassy place through which she could see them.

The days crumbled away one by one, none too fast or too slow. She was feverishly happy, spending long hours making plans with Allen. Soon they would land at Cherbourg, and then would come Paris!

Allen knew Paris well. He told her what they would do, where they would go, and how the first weeks of their life should be spent. She had never been to Paris except with her rather strict parents. Now suddenly its possibilities were unfolded to the awakened sensuousness of her imagination. She thought of it as an indulgent mother to lovers, a city where nested unfamiliar sensations and delights. She prepared for the Paris of the wonderful opera "Louise" with its street cry, "*Voilà l'plaisir, Mesdames, voilà l'plaisir!*" These things were her right, just as love was her right.

"We could n't help it, could we?" she asked Allen suddenly one afternoon. It was the day before their expected arrival at Cherbourg. He sat on the narrow berth, watching her pack. The act of packing this bag, of putting her things into it,

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seemed connected by a thin thread leading back to a night eternities ago, when with similar mechanical gestures, she had thrust the same things into the same bag. An enormous distance and change separated her manner of accomplishing this simple task. Yet the relation between the Nona of Then and the Nona of Now, was sufficiently fundamental for a painful memory to stir in its hastily dug grave. The memory stirred and apparently from a secret starting point of her own, she cried out excusingly to her lover.

“We could n’t help it, could we?”

This was a kind of philosophy, a tacit agreement between lovers and Fate, to disclaim responsibility. Nona adopted it, and wished to try it, just as she was willing to try all creeds, hoping to find a permanent one. But Allen’s philosophy was otherwise. He refused to excuse what he felt to be a legitimate victory of the strongest force.

“Yes, we could have,” he answered at once, “but we did n’t want to.”

“No, no,” she cried. Rising to her feet, she let slip to the floor all the small objects which had been waiting their turn for place in the bag. A few hair-pins rolled under the berth, and a comb and brush and a scarf dropped and lay unnoticed. She went over to Allen, her eyes ready for tears, her weakness ready for support.

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"If we could have helped it, perhaps it would have been wrong."

"How, wrong?" He looked at her curiously, tipping her chin down with an imperious hand.

"I've never been sure what was right or wrong," she admitted, standing at his knees. "But it just seems as if I could n't have come to you, if I'd been sure Sylvus needed me."

"We make right or wrong by our will, child," he said and drew her onto his lap. "You *wanted* me to love you and I did. That was right then — I *wanted* you to come away and you did. That was right too —"

"But if — any one suffers, because — of it?" She hid her head on his shoulder.

He held her for a moment without speaking. "Then they suffer because they're weaker than we and *that* is wrong," he said at last.

"Oh, dear," she sighed, "if I thought —"

"It's too late to think." He forced her head from its hiding-place and stared straight into her eyes. "Nona, girl, you love me, don't you? You're mine. Some day you'll be my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes. You don't suppose I'm a French novel villain, do you? He'll divorce you, of course, and then — you'll be my wife." He held her to him with a sudden powerful gesture of possession.

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"I've got you now, and do you think I'll *ever* let you go? A man of my age, who's mad for a woman the way I am for you — my Nona?" He buried his face in the rich-scented masses of her hair. "Nona, Nona!" and rocked her fiercely.

"Oh, Allen," she cried, her voice muffled by contact with his coat, "What a *man* you are! what a *man*!"

He laughed, releasing her suddenly. "Go back to your packing, little witch, and leave right and wrong alone."

Tumbled of hair and flushed of cheeks she went. The next day they arrived at Cherbourg.

CHAPTER XXII

UPON their arrival in Paris, they went to a hotel on the Quai Voltaire. All that Nona remembered of this hotel was the window of her room which framed a lopped-off view of the Louvre and the Seine narrowed by an encroaching border of open book-stalls. At certain hours on the opposite side of the street from the hotel, a line of *fiacres* and patient horses with heads bowed between their crooked, bulging, front knees, were strung like a long, thin necklace of black beads stretching away past the window's framing limits. Each time a bead dropped from the invisible beginning of the line, the rest mechanically crept forward an inch. Nona called them "the worm," and felt sorry for them. They looked so utterly hopeless and dejected, and the coachmen were almost always drunk.

There was an exciting irregularity about these first days in Paris which more than fulfilled the expectancies of her restlessness and passion for the unknown. She was more like a child than ever, eager and enthusiastic. Allen showed her, as he

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had promised, the brilliant glimpses of a Paris which amuses itself, never refusing any of her caprices, or seeming to grow tired of the race after new pleasures into which she threw herself with ardor. He was quite perfect, she thought happily when she thought at all, and that was not often.

He was also generous. He superintended an order for gowns at one of the biggest *couturières*, chose her hats, gave her an exquisite diamond pendant and treated her to a continuous delirium of sight, touch and taste, sweeping her off her guard in the intensity of a passion controlled only by an Anglo-Saxon sense of fitness.

With the exception of a few, stolen hours at twilight, alone on the bridges, watching Paris retreat to a dream at either length of the Seine, she had no time to herself. But these hours were precious and grew more precious as the days passed. She loved the Seine. Paris seemed to have risen from it, leaving shadows. Its depths gave back nothing but shadows, even when the sun shone brightest or the skies were dull and drab; even at night, when the orange and red city fires spattered down from their places, falling like lead to the water's bottom, goring holes into its secret. Bleeding, wounded and stoic, each sunset, it remained unconquered. She felt it to be almost as old and wise as the Nile, and less virgin than the sea.

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Sometimes, when purple gauze floated between her eyes and the distances, and the setting sun, like a spilt glass of wine, stained the gilded victories flying from the Bridge Alexander III, while in the opposite direction, the Island of Saint Louis, a vanishing silhouette, grew gray as smoke and the romantic, uneven roof-lines wavered across soft skies and all around even the noises of traffic and the busy people sank to obedience of the hour,—these times the great city seemed to exhale dreams like vapors which encompassed her, detached her from herself and sent her thoughts drifting off to reveries always a little sad and wistful.

These were moods she kept to herself. Allen would not understand them. It was what he *saw* in her eyes which translated her to him and he never saw wistfulness. She was a child to him or a mistress, a delightful child to be humored, a mistress to love. He allowed her to be alone only when he had something else to do, usually during the hours he spent in lost, little book-shops, unearthed with the hunting instinct of a bibliophile. He was never so happy or so boyish as when he was discovering and bargaining for some quaint edition in old French with delicate engravings. He preferred memoirs, letters written by gallants or ladies of the French court at its most brilliant epochs, histories of France and eighteenth-century songs. Nona did

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not care for the books. She said they smelt of dust and worms, and grew so impatient and restless when he took her with him that he soon accepted her distaste and went alone.

The rain and winds of March blew into April. The out-of-doors was subtly charged with spring, scents of lilac buds and unfurling young leaves. They had been at the Hotel of the Quai Voltaire now for three weeks and almost imperceptibly the novelty of perpetual theaters and restaurants began to pall. Nona dreaded the inevitable question, "Where shall we go to-night, dear?" with which Allen courteously consulted her wishes. She showed occasional very feminine tempers and nervous discussions between them became frequent, where everything that Allen suggested was wrong, and she could suggest nothing in its place. He accepted coldly her less pleasant moods, never tender when she fretted, always master of himself and her. She was sure to repent and cling to him, crying for forgiveness and these times of repentance were the ones when she felt most in love with him, most dependent on his approval.

The second week in April, he told her he was thinking of taking an apartment where they might be more alone than at a hotel. He told her this one evening while they were dressing to go out for

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dinner. There was a domestic atmosphere in the room, an intimacy almost commonplace in its acquired habit.

"I want to stay in Paris through June," he said, "but it's getting to be the season now and — well, the people we know will be flocking over here. We'll be more to ourselves in a nice, little apartment, girlie."

She had forgotten the people they knew. It had grown to be so natural to be with Allen, that she had lost sense of the change in their position socially. She felt suddenly shocked and disturbed at the necessity to think of them. There was a certain world she had always considered it her right to know. Now Allen, without meaning to be brutal, had reminded her that she could no longer hope to be recognized by it. He seemed to accept that fact as a matter of course, a minor detail, but she revolted to a state of quick panic at the possibility of anything disagreeable happening which might vulgarize her situation in her own eyes. They had never spoken of the worldly aspect of their position. Made to face it, she found her courage lacking.

"Oh, Allen, *will* we?" she murmured. "I don't know what I will do."

"It's unavoidable in the spring, sweetheart.

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All New York emigrates to Paris," he said. "Here, Nona, let me fix your collar. It's unhooked. You look adorable to-night."

"Let's go away from Paris, Allen."

He frowned over the task he had set himself. "There, it's hooked now. Foolish baby, we'd meet people we know wherever we went. The world is small. We're far better in a big city. Are you ready? We'll have a good dinner to-night, shall we?"

She was very silent as they drove away from the hotel. "Don't let's go to the Café de Paris," she begged all of a sudden, putting her hand on his arm. "I'm *sure* we'll meet some one. I *feel* it. Please let's dine at a very quiet restaurant where no one we *could* know will be."

"Nonsense," he said good-humoredly enough, patting her hand. "You never would have thought of these things if I had n't mentioned them. I've engaged our table. Be a brave child, Nona. You can't afford to be sensitive."

So they went to the Café de Paris.

She entered the brightly-lighted restaurant with self-conscious eyes and too red cheeks, following close behind Allen to their table, sinking at once into her seat, as if all she wished just then was not to attract attention. During the dinner she darted startled, suspicious glances at every one who went

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in or out of the big door. She had managed to work herself up to a miserable state of trouble and self-consciousness, imagining glacial, snubbing faces turned inquisitively toward them, penetrating and guessing who she was and what she was. Whenever any of the gorgeously gowned women and insolently smart men stared at her, hot blushes played on the surface of her cheeks and cold shivers traveled up her spine.

"Allen," she whispered more than once, "I'm *sure* we know those people in the corner. They're Americans, and they look at us all the time."

Allen, unconcerned, went on eating his fish. "Don't be absurd, dear. I never saw them before. And suppose they *did* know us, there is no use giving them the satisfaction of looking as guilty as you are doing."

She took up a glass of Burgundy, but her hand trembled. "I don't know what's the *matter* with me, but I hate this restaurant now, and these women and men—I—I want to be in the dark alone with you."

"Poor baby. Here, have some more wine."

The dinner seemed interminable. It seemed to her that she was being exposed in a glare of indifferent light to the judgment and criticism of a world, grown enemy.

Once they were outside, tucked in a closed car-

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riage on their way back to the hotel, she breathed freely for the first time that evening. Allen took her in his arms and kissed her, but somehow his kisses failed to quiet her.

"I don't want to go to those places any more," she declared.

"Where shall we go then?"

"We'll find somewhere quieter."

"You'd be bored to death."

"No, I won't, I promise you. I *want* to be hidden."

"All right, sweetheart." He promised easily, refusing to discuss the matter further.

That night she dreamed that she was out alone on a street where there were a great many people. None of them would speak or smile at her. She saw Allen walking away, his back to her, and when she called him, he would not turn. Then everyone jeered because when she called her lover, he would not come to her. She faced them all, her back against a wall, and tried to answer, but suddenly she could not see them. She was blind.

She woke screaming, and Allen could not comfort her.

The next morning, the whole incident seemed less significant, the dream unreal. She only wanted to sleep. Allen went out quickly and did not come back

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until late. It was past lunch time when finally he arrived, carrying a big bunch of jonquils which he tossed at her even before he reached her side. "Still in bed at this hour? Lazy girl! I've got good news for you," he cried cheerfully. "I've got an apartment."

At once she was interested. "Have you? where? Is it pretty?"

"Get up and come to see it. Are all the nerves gone?"

While she dressed, he told her about it. He had, it seemed, that very morning, read the advertisements of furnished apartments, found this particular one which sounded attractive and lost no time in going to visit it.

"It's on this side of the river — quite a student quarter. From what you said last night, I thought you wouldn't mind, and to tell you the truth, dear, we've been living pretty expensively these days. I'll have to be careful for a while —"

"But it's what I wanted," she cried. "I've always wanted to live that kind of life, Allen."

The apartment belonged to an English writer who had gone to Italy for the spring months. It looked out on a big courtyard at the back of which was another house. There was a sign at the entrance of this house, "*Maladies des Yeux*." It had not oc-

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curred to Allen that the sign might suggest anything painful to Nona, but when later in the day, he brought her gaily to examine his find, as they entered the courtyard she stopped short in the middle of a sentence and stared.

“What’s the matter?” he turned to her.

She pointed to the sign.

“Really, Nona dear, you’re exaggerating. Here I’ve found a perfect place, thinking it would please you and you notice a thing like that hospital which is quite separate from the house we’re going to live in.”

He seemed so disappointed that she felt strongly her own unreasonableness.

“It does n’t matter — really,” and without another word she followed him and the concierge up the five flights of steep stairs in the dark hall.

“I’m sorry there’s no elevator,” he said. “I hesitated on that account. But there is so much light and air in the rooms that it makes it worth while, and you can take the stairs slowly, Nona, can’t you?”

“I don’t mind them at all,” she answered.

The apartment was delightful, done in cool greens with comfortable leather chairs scooped to the mold of former lazy occupants, and crisp, white curtains through which the sun poured. In the sitting-room there was a little mahogany tea-

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table on wheels, crowned with a fine, brass samovar and an Empire tea set; there was also a green-shaded lamp; a spacious writing table, a divan, and on the walls a few reproductions of Botticelli's and da Vinci's. Two bed rooms, quite a big kitchen and an improvised bathroom which showed Anglo-Saxon habits, completed the place.

A clean, smiling *femme de ménage* met them at the door. She had been three years with the English mademoiselle and hoped that Monsieur and Madame would be amiable enough to find use for her.

Nona answered her reassuringly and beckoned Allen aside.

"Do these people know we're not married?" she asked him timidly.

He laughed. "Dear little Nona, such things are everyday occurrences here. But I certainly have n't *told* them."

"Are you *sure*, Allen? I think it all seems so strange."

"Do you like it here?"

She looked rather wistfully towards the window. "Yes, I do."

"Then it's settled," he said briskly. At a sign from him the concierge, a benevolent, weazened, little man came forward from the hall to talk over final arrangements.

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She wandered into the sitting-room and opening the window, leaned out. The *femme de ménage* came and stood by her.

"Madame will take cold."

"No." But she drew back and closed the window as soon as she was disturbed by the woman's voice. "Tell me, does one see much of the sick people?"

"*Mon Dieu, non*, Madame! The poor ones, they come and go so quietly. It is sad, not so, to have trouble with the eyes?"

The next day she and Allen moved from the hotel. It was done so easily and simply that it seemed hard to realize the change. Only that first evening with Allen standing before a tiny coal fire that she had wished to be built in spite of the warmth outside, did she begin to realize that there *was* a change. It was an almost insensible solidifying of relations between them. Here at last was life together, *en ménage*, as the French would say, life savoring of the domestic, sheltering as it were, giving a sensation of more permanency to their relations. Staring at Allen, he appeared very much like any husband warming his back to the fire, smiling down at her. Then a vision of the fateful day long ago in the country flashed to her mind.

He was puffing at a cigar. "This is delightful," he remarked, "a nice little woman, a cozy room."

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Again the past rose unbidden, an image this time of another fire in a brown room, and Allen, an afternoon caller, standing looking down at her. There was certain irony in the contrast of then and now. She wondered suddenly if the sign over the Eye Hospital was one of those electric advertisements which light up after dark. But the shutters were closed giving an impression of total darkness outside.

“Are you happy, dearest?” He threw his cigar away and came near her. The light shone soft on his profile, one of his long, firm hands felt for hers. He showed what he was,—a contented, relaxed animal, pleased with his own fireside and his own woman.

She stirred among the cushions. “Are you?”

“It’s the first time in my life I’ve ever felt settled,” he answered lazily.

“I’m glad we’re here in this part of town,” she said. “I want to live very simply for a while, Allen, not the way we’ve been living at all.”

“You shall do as you want, girlie.”

“Are there many Americans in this quarter?”

“Nothing but students — mostly from the West, studying art. You’re not likely to know any of them.”

“How Worden would storm at that!”

“Why speak of Worden?”

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"I happened to think of him, that 's all," she said simply.

"Let us bury all those people. They don't belong to our new life."

"I *do* think of them sometimes." She rose from the divan and wandered over to the window, trying to peer through the shutters.

CHAPTER XXIII

THEIR life together in this apartment and in this particular quarter of Paris was quite different from what it had been during the first weeks at the hotel. There was less excitement now, more time to think, more of an inevitable commonplaceness in their relations.

Allen loved her. There was no doubt about that. He loved her with all the satisfied egoism of a man who has conquered, and is a jealous conqueror. She had thought that in going away with him, she would be free, but she soon found that she had never been less so. He exercised an overwhelming command of her time and strength which in the beginning fascinated, then vaguely dismayed her. He had quickly acquired in the domestic atmosphere of his own four walls, comfortable habits which he assumed would be hers also. So it was, that seeming always to accord to her wishes and moods the gallant courtesy of a lover still in love, he usually managed by the dominant suggestion of his will to have his own way in everything.

It amused him for a while to live the student life

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with her; to eat in the many small restaurants around Montparnasse and Raspail; to watch her wide-eyed interest in the new and different types she saw in these restaurants; to guide her around the labyrinthian streets of what is commonly known as the Latin Quarter, near the Pantheon, to sit outside on the terrace of such cafés as D'Harcourt's of Boulevard St. Michel fame, and stare at what is left of student local color — a color, it must be admitted, grown dingy and sordid with much abuse.

But when the questionable food of the little restaurants and the dubious, picturesque reputation of the students wearied his fastidiousness, he would take her to a conservative and traditional restaurant like Foyot's, near the Luxembourg Gardens, where the waiters had grown white-haired in service and there were old gentlemen with tiny red ribbons in their buttonholes, who seemed always to have breakfasted, lunched and dined at the same tables. Here, mellowed by the warmth of good wines and food, as he intended she should be, Nona would expand, become languorous, meeting his eyes electrically, grateful to him for their mastery, and it would seem to her as if she were meant for only that kind of thing,— lights and food and wine and a man like Allen beside her.

Or again he would take her to the theater and

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they would sit safe and hidden in the discreet *baignoires*, the boxes screened as if for harem use, by a wooden lattice-work which permitted the people in them to see out but no one to see in. Nona hated these boxes. She felt the necessity of them to be humiliating and only her dread of meeting people she knew caused her to accept the protection of the screen.

The more she thought of it the more the whole scheme of her life seemed illogical. Allen took everything as a matter of course and she nothing. Indoors they lived now like a married couple with occasional feminine tempers and masculine obstinacies but when they went out together the savor of irregular relationship accentuated itself by her acquired consciousness of what the attitude of her world would be, should it meet her.

She could not help wondering if Allen had not been through similar experiences before. One day she asked him, "Have you ever lived with another woman who — was n't your wife?"

He stiffened at once to displeased severity. "You are my wife, Nona."

It was a direct rebuke which brought a flush to her cheeks. As for being his wife, she found it hard to realize what must happen before they could even think of marrying, and she avoided the issue or discussion of a divorce. It meant bringing

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Sylvus actively into her life again. She did not feel brave or strong enough to face what he still represented to her of pain and tenderness, sentiments not in keeping with her feeling for Allen. Sometimes she wondered if she could ever forget or entirely efface the images of her past life with Sylvus.

There are only a limited amount of animate and inanimate things in the world and these all parented, it would seem, each reminding one of the other. Her mind, in spite of itself, established connections between times of day, street corners, lights, smells, voices and silhouettes with uncannily similar things she had seen or felt under previous circumstances. There were, in fact, ghosts everywhere; canaries hanging in windows reminding her of Daphnis and Chloe; flowers poignantly familiar. Even Allen's hobby for books made her think often of Sylvus's hobby for vases, the same pleasure over a new addition to the collection, the same love of touching the treasure, the same joy in being its possessor, with the difference only of expression in it all. There was one great part of her life with Sylvus, however, which she could and did avoid. That was music. She missed it sadly but felt it was an emotion forfeited, too intimately allied with him to bear its effect on her imagination. And Allen did not care much for music.

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The truth of it all was that she felt lonely. She had no friends, no women whose easy sophistry or wise advice could explain and support the secret confessions which women only make to women. She had never before felt the longing for intimate women friends, nor had she ever known any who might now show loyalty and protection to her, and a new-born consciousness of this lack of support made her sad. She had grown accustomed and fond of the quarter in which they lived, but was not at her ease in an atmosphere of people who worked and were evidently independent in their way of thinking and living. Lonely and apart from them, inactive as a worker or creating-unit in their world, she felt less conspicuous, more lost as a social problem among their facile and unobserving acceptance of things and people. Yet watching them more and more intelligently, she found much to deplore and analyze, especially when she turned her attention towards the number of American women who were studying various forms of art in various ways. These women were apt either to be shoddy and hopelessly uninspired in their methods of work or vulgar in self-assurance and loud advertisement of their talents. She felt them as a class to be incapable by experience or home training to cope with student life in this bewildering French capital, where so many generations had left the Latin in-

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fluence of cynical moral margin for artists. In the small restaurants where she and Allen still went at her request, usually for luncheon, she remarked a cheap spirit of mediocrity masquerading as Bohemianism which often brought to mind poor Worden's theories. How much safer and better these young ambitious girls would be in their own country, where, if they really did possess the immortal and unquenchable flame of fine talent, it would burn higher in the end for its perhaps more sober encouragement, where the cleaner ideals of their own homes would repress the intoxication of temporary freedom in Paris! Here were daughters of plain people learning enough to make them discontented, dreaming of brilliant careers and going back most likely to the disillusionizing necessity of teaching what they had learned, unable in the end, through lack of money or influence or for the most part actual talent, to continue what they had begun. She felt sorry for their families at home, straining their bank accounts so that their children might live in a cheap *pension*, eat unhealthy food and alas! often take lessons with unscrupulous teachers. She would so often see girls, with music rolls or daubed canvases beside them, swallowing impractical meals, drinking cheap wine and making easy companions of the many corresponding men students who hovered around them chatting the superficial jargon

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of art. It all seemed wrong somehow, wrong and stupid.

There was a particular restaurant on the Boulevard Raspail in which she felt more at home. At midday the narrow, little room, painted in white, was crowded with hungry, chattering young men and women presided over by a smiling *patronne*, who seemed to know them all intimately. Here came many of the Beaux Arts men, and a few models; here, there were kind-eyed, long-bearded painters in spotted velveteens, and merry, healthy-looking American girls of the saner type who were evidently not taking themselves or their work too seriously. She came to know many of them by sight, and to feel almost as if they were, or at least might be, friends, if only Allen were a little more sociable.

Among the men, there was one who interested her most particularly. He was a tiny creature, very dark and sad, with an unhealthy pallor betraying insufficient nourishment. He was always alone, his head sunk on his meager chest, his large, somber eyes wandering often in her direction. It was a strange gesture of his which first made her notice him. He would suddenly dart out his arm as if to snatch at something invisible just beyond his reach, his fingers would grasp convulsively at the air and with a swift, backward movement, his arm would

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jerk to his side again. She found herself wondering who and what he was, and what such a gesture could mean.

One day, in the happy promiscuity permitted during the rush hour, he came and sat at their table and she never knew how he managed, but before luncheon was over he had entered into conversation with Allen. Then she found out that he was an Athenian who preferred, according to his modest explanation of himself, to live in a garret in Paris and write poetry, to obeying his father and entering the Greek navy.

“My country is very beautiful,” he said in surprisingly good English, fixing his large, mournful eyes upon the glory of her hair, “but as a country it is finished. It is too sad and I am too sad for us to live together. Do you not see? Here I have a little window looking out at the towers of St. Sulpice. I write the poems no one will read; I live as I chose; I wait.”

“For what?” she asked, more impulsively than discreetly.

He smiled quaintly. “To die as I chose,” he said. She had never seen any one like him or heard any one talk as he did, and he frightened and depressed her a little. She sat rather silent while Allen asked him instructive and interested questions about Greece which he answered, as she

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thought, wearily, without enthusiasm. When they took leave of him, he handed Allen his card.

As soon as they were out on the street alone, she seized the card, but the name upon it, Constantin Nicolaïdes, apart from being obviously Greek, told her nothing.

"He's an odd chap," observed Allen; "a little crazy, don't you think?"

"He interests me," she said.

"It's a bad thing on principle to take to these foreigners. One does n't know who they are. They may be escaped convicts in their own country."

"He's well bred," she said with conviction. "I'm sure he must be all right, Allen."

"You seem quite enthusiastic over him," said Allen rather coldly, and she realized if she wished to see the little poet again, she had best not talk of him any more.

Several times after that he sat at their table, and then one day he called. Allen was out.

Nona was victim that afternoon of one of those vague, moth-like melancholies which, having no tangible starting point or reason, thicken and make heavy the heart. The windows of the sitting-room were open and the May sun, streaming in, lit up the green walls. She leaned out of the window and breathed in the warm, scented air. She had been

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glad when Allen left her to go for his walk and yet she hated being alone.

A certain flatness of soul and sense of the profitless use of her time goaded her to a new discontent which could not be admirable, she told herself, since in each next phase of her evolution as it were, she found other proofs of her instability and vacillating grasp of herself. People might call her just another one of those foolish, hysterical women who never would know what they wanted. There was a possible injustice in this classing of her as a type, a condemnation which if it had not already been pronounced, she imagined would be given her by judges she would some day find, and she honestly wished to concentrate all her "selves" into one reasonable permanent one, which would be the real Nona, able to withstand too harsh judgment. Instead, she seemed to be engaged on a fatiguing and perpetual shifting of point of view, not calculated to convince or deserve respect from any one to whom she might try to explain it. To Allen she was and would always be a child. Perhaps he was right. All these thoughts had their way with her while the sun, uninfluenced by her mood, played fire with her hair. It was then that the door bell was rung by the poet, Constantin Nicolaïdes.

She was surprised and glad to see him. He offered her at once with an absurdly ceremonious and

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important bow a modest, little bunch of violets. "They are the violets of Paris," he said, "but they do smell like the violets of Athens."

She held them pensively, "Always violets," she murmured and then remembering her manners thanked him for them.

"You, too, are sad?" His big eyes had lost nothing of the shadows in her face.

"It's the violets," she confessed on an impulse of frankness. "I do love your having brought them, but they remind me of — things that I —"

"I shall often then bring them to you. It must be beautiful to have memories, even sad. I am a poet and yet I have never had memories."

"I'm beginning to think that I would give anything to get away from mine," she said slowly.

"Ah, you will die with them and I without them." His arm shot out, and his fingers opened and closed upon the air.

"You always speak of dying," she said a trifle impatiently. "Why do you?"

"It is one of the things I most do think of. It is my destiny to die young."

She put a hand up to her eyes and turned away from him. "Who can be sure of destiny?"

"It is always the thing which draws us most strongly towards it," he answered and his voice was prophetic.

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There was a click at the front door. "There is my — there is Monsieur," she cried and almost relieved at the interruption, she ran into the hall to meet Allen.

"Our little Greek is here."

He stopped near the door, the key in his hand. "Is he? Who asked *him*?"

"Why he just *came*!"

He bent to kiss her, his cheek fresh from the out-of-doors. "Rather cool of him," he whispered. "I hope he does n't do it often."

She stood in the hall letting him enter alone the room in which the poet waited. She was disappointed and aggrieved that he had spoken so inhospitably of their guest. Was he *never* going to want to have any friends, or allow her to have any?

Constantin looked up to her as she came slowly into the room a moment later.

"Monsieur Dietrich has asked of me what I write. I tell him, of the most wonderful thing — the soul."

Allen stood by the window, blowing rings from his cigarette, and looking his most bored self at the poet who sat hunched in a chair, his pale face upturned to the waning light.

"You believe in it?" she asked suddenly.

"But yes, Madame, or I should not write of it.

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I never do or say anything which I do not believe."

"You must do and say very little," remarked Allen dryly.

"That is so."

"Does it mean happiness to be so sincere?" began Nona.

Constantin smiled. "It means the repose of truth, the beginning of a circle in which we all turn through things we do not mean back to the starting point. Children and dying men believe in God."

"A circle," she repeated thoughtfully.

"All things are circles, all tragedies, all destinies; things which once started with birth have no alternative but to circle back."

Nona would have liked to have gone on listening to the poet's talk, but Allen was unusually taciturn and soon Constantin took his leave. She knew well what Allen would say when they were alone.

"He's crazy. I hate to hear you encouraging such stuff, Nona. People don't babble about the soul and death and truth and all those big words unless they're fanatics or very great bores."

"I liked it," she insisted.

They did not speak of him again that evening. After dinner they walked by the Seine. The moon was a thin, unwrinkled circle pasted against a sea-

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blue sky. Beneath the bridges the river ran black in strong currents; boats, huddled together upon it, swayed, uneasy and dark; Notre Dame was a phantom with unfurled wings; the lights, red and orange, looked like huge, jeweled pins stuck in the night with invisible points which hurt invisible things. Paris sounds purred and roared and rang bells in the distances. Nona liked being out on the quais at night. The whole mystery of Paris seemed breaking like a sea at her feet. The streets were nearly deserted, only a few wretched women slunk or stepped boldly among the shadows, their eyes blackened and unnaturally bright. One of them scowled at Nona as she passed and muttered indistinguishable abuse.

“Why did she?” asked Nona.

“Because she’s alone and you’re not,” answered Allen crudely.

“For that?” She clung to him, her face expressing distaste.

When they reached home, he caught her in his arms and carried her to her room.

“Let me go—to-night,” she whispered and struggled to be free.

He put her down at once, his voice cold. “Certainly.”

She closed the shutters, blew out her lamp and crept silently into bed. As she was drifting off to

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sleep, she thought of the woman's eyes dark with hate, glaring at her from the night, then of Allen's, and at last on the fringe of dreams, of Sylvus no longer blind, with eyes which seemed to see, eyes large, untroubled, looking her through and through.

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR a week after Nona left him, Sylvus was like a dumb, sick animal at the point of death. He sat in his big chair near the fire and shivered, with hardly more than a mumbled response to the broken-hearted questions of old Antonin who never left his side these days, and with never a sign to Richard Worden, hovering clumsily over him, a mother-look in his faithful eyes, or to Laura, who came and went quietly. Once only as she entered the brown room, he had lifted his head from the hiding cup of his hands and whispered, "Who is that rustling?"

At her voice, he hid his face again.

"If he would only play," she said then to Richard.

"He has n't touched his violin since she went," he answered moodily.

"I'm going to make him." When Laura spoke in that voice she always had her way.

So it happened that the very next day she took out his Amati from its case, unwrapped the silken scarf in which Sylvus had always so lovingly kept

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it swathed, and carrying it and his favorite bow with gentle care, went to him where he sat, somber, silent. Without a word she put the violin in his hands and left him. He stayed holding it, as if he did not realize what it was. Then suddenly he caught it to his breast. Tears fell the length of his thin cheeks, trickling down to the gloss of his dear instrument's back. Very slowly he raised it to his shoulder, and poised the bow. Laura, standing outside the half-open door, clutched Richard's arm.

"Now!" she whispered.

Like timid invalids trying to walk, came the first few wavering notes. Sylvus had risen from his chair, and gaunt and tense, stood near the piano. As he played, all his desolation, his bitter grief, the unutterable sorrow which had been stagnating in his soul, gathered force, broke bonds of silence and swept to a lament of passionate expression. His violin took the voice, hoarse and distraught, of a man who cries out in a delivering plaint of love abused. The wounded animal whimpered and moaned, the heart of the Amati sobbed.

Old Antonin crept behind Richard and Laura in the hall, crossing himself with a trembling, gloveless hand. "The Virgin be blessed," he murmured. And the three who loved Sylvus stayed close together in the shadows of the hall listening to him play.

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Suddenly there was an ugly rasp of bow against string, the music stopped and Sylvus called.

“Antonin! — Antonin!”

Antonin hobbled forward eagerly. “Here, Monsieur. Here is Antonin — Ah, my dear master, what it does to me to see you again with the violin.”

“Antonin,” his voice was quiet and sounded far away. “Are there flowers in the room? I don’t smell them.”

“*Non — non*, there are no flowers,” stammered the old servant. “We did think —”

Laura came softly into the room. “You shall have them, Sylvus dear.”

He passed a hand wearily over his forehead. “I want all the kinds *she* liked, only not violets — not violets. And where are the canaries, Laura? I don’t hear them sing any more.”

“I took them away but I’ll bring them back again.”

“Thank you,” he said.

The next day there were flowers which thickened the air of the brown room with their perfume, and in their golden cage Daphnis and Chloe warbled joyously.

Then very slowly Sylvus began to live again, to move, to talk and always to play, but there was about him a consuming fever of suffering, of inconsolable loneliness, which was heart-rending to the devoted

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friends who surrounded him with care and love. It was as if during that week he had sat shivering and inarticulate near the fire, he had penetrated far into the mystery of passion and had come to question those worlds of restlessness and unreprieve of soul which had driven Nona from him. Since the tragic night when alone he had faced the fear, found his home empty, called Nona in vain, something poignant and human had torn from his blindness its white veil, and shown him the naked possibilities of struggling, impotent, dark-browed mankind. What he found within himself was self condemnation. Nona would not have left him had he better understood the poor, fluttering, uncertain soul and body of her. He had been too serene, too sure of a woman's immaculacy of vision.

"I want to understand," he would repeat to Richard. "She never meant to hurt this way. I have failed her."

Richard would not listen to such a humble attitude. "Forget her — divorce her — get rid of her — she deserves it. If ever a man were too good to his wife, that man's you."

"I can't," Sylvus would say simply. "I can't and won't divorce her. It would be accusing her. She may need my name some day as a protection. If she wants to, she can divorce me."

"O Lord, what a quixotic fool!" It always

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ended by such a groan from Richard. All he could do in the face of Sylvus's steady resolution was to hush the matter, keep it out of the newspapers and preserve an obstinate silence when any one spoke of Nona before him.

Petroff often came to see Sylvus these days. At first Richard would turn his back and walk out of the room when Petroff walked in. But on Laura's advice a sulky truce was established, and he adapted an elaborate neutrality of attitude which could deceive no one as to his contempt for the suave Polish pianist. Petroff remained correct with both Richard and Laura, greeting them whenever he met them at Sylvus's with the same faint smile in which lurked an irritating suggestion of patronage and complacency. It might have been translated as a "told-you-so" smile.

There was question of an important tour for him and Sylvus, including the European capitals. Sylvus's impresario came to talk it over one day, a month after Nona's departure.

"You've got to keep before the public, Mr. Leete," he said. He was a vulgar, energetic, little man with a beak nose and sharp, calculating eyes. He sat back in his chair, fitting the tips of his ten fingers nicely together to shape a Gothic arch, and staring at Sylvus as one stares at a good investment. "You've been pretty quiet all winter. Big

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chance here — money in it. Petroff will go. Tell you what I'll do. I'll assure you a certain amount before you leave. Could n't be squarer, could I?"

"I'll think it over," said Sylvus wearily.

The next evening Laura and Worden came to dinner, and he spoke of it to them.

"I'm not sure I'll go," he said.

"Of course you'll go," growled Richard. "I tell you what I suggest! Let me see, April, May, June. I guess I'll go with you. Say, Laura! Why don't you take a holiday? You can get an order for some articles over there, and we'll all go!" He banged a mighty fist on the piano. "We'll all go, Sylvus boy! Eh, Laura?"

"I might," she answered thoughtfully.

"*She's* there," murmured Sylvus. "In her letter she —"

"Well, Europe's big enough. You're not going to let her spoil your career I suppose. Here's something worth while for you."

"Yes, I know — but Laura understands, I'm sure she does. To think of *her* perhaps being in the same city with me and not — I can't bear it —"

"Yes, I do understand," said Laura in her calm, quiet voice. "But I think you'd better go, Sylvus. You never may be sure where she is. She might come back here."

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"That's so." He sat drooping, his long, thin hand stroking his chin.

"You —" began Richard, but Laura signaled him, a finger on her lips and he kept quiet.

"Don't you see," she told him later when they left the house together, "you must say nothing of Nona to Sylvus. He loves her more than he ever did."

"I'd like to find her," cried Richard savagely, "and that man too. Lord! if ever I catch *him!*"

He paced beside her down the quiet street, his head hunched between his shoulders, his hands in his pockets. Just then in spite of his enormous size and strength, he appeared singularly boyish. Laura put a hand on his arm, and they walked on in silence, she keeping pace with his stride.

"Say, Athene — How is it I've never asked you to marry me?" he blurted as they neared her street.

"We're just pals. It would spoil it all," she answered quietly, and they walked on to her door. He gave her hand a bear grip and stood towering over her, looking down. "Now this business of Sylvus's — I've never spoken of that part of it, but it's knocked my plans into a cocked hat," he said gruffly.

"I know." She responded to the grip of his hand.

"I'm pretty discouraged —" he spoke slowly.

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"Athene, if we go with him, let's get married first. What do you think?"

She smiled very sweetly and shook her head. "I'm afraid not, Richard. You and I are not the marrying sort."

He stood awkwardly, first on one foot, then on the other, like any embarrassed schoolboy making his first declaration of love. "Never knew a woman I cared about as I do for you. You're as good a pal as if you were a man."

"I'll keep on being one." She patted his shoulder and turned away. He watched until the door closed behind her, then he strode off into the shadows, his head down.

Back in the brown room where they had left him, Sylvus sat huddled in his chair. Antonin, who slept in the apartment now, invented pretexts to stay near him. The old man was suffering from a bad attack of rheumatism but he staunchly refused to complain aloud, for fear that Sylvus might know and send him to bed. He pottered around the vases, pretending to rearrange them further from the edge of the shelf.

"I can't sleep to-night. Go on to bed, Antonin!" said Sylvus.

"Non, Monsieur, I neither cannot sleep."

"I wonder where she is," murmured Sylvus, broodingly.

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“I cannot think of her, Monsieur.” The old servant’s voice shook with an emotion he could not dissemble. He left the vases and hobbled forward near his master. “Ah, Monsieur, my poor old heart is broken.”

“And mine.”

There was silence between servant and master, as if they were mourning together over some one dead. Then Antonin shook his head and tears fell down his withered cheeks. “I did tell her that she would come to no good,” he grieved. “I, who have known and loved her since she was a tiny baby. I, who have lived to see this day. *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* who would have thought, so sweet she was, so good of heart!”

“Yes,” said Sylvus. “She must have been beautiful.”

The old man leaned against the back of the chair. “An angel, Monsieur. When she was *so* high, like a flower herself, the mignonne, a flower growing in fire. Her hair, it was fire, flames which did curl and burn about her little, pretty face. And such a child for play! —” His voice grew eager. “Always did she run and sing, and it was ‘Antonin amuse me!’ like a little queen, and ‘Antonin, what shall we do now?’ Ah, but I did love the child!”

“Tell me more.”

“And then, as a young girl, her parents did let

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her have her own way always. Such pretty manners, Monsieur. One could not resist her. And so fond of music she was! And beautiful things! Also I was happy when I saw how Monsieur was a fine husband. May the good God punish her! — and him!”

“Hush!”

Rising suddenly from his chair, Sylvus stood rigid, his arms outstretched. “Where is she now?” he groaned. “Why could I not give her the love she wanted? I used to leave her too much for the sake of my music. I was selfish — what could I know of women? If she were only here now, I would *make* her love me. I never knew until she went — she said in the letter I did n’t need her. My God! to say that! Look at me, Antonin. Am I less a man because I’m blind? Less eager to love?” He groped forward, tense and quivering with the emotion of his own thoughts. “I was blind then, blind in other ways than having my eyes closed — Antonin, are you there? Am I alone?”

“Monsieur, I am here.” The old servant went close to him and took his arm.

Suddenly he drooped, seeming to shrivel and grow thinner, his hands fell nervelessly to his sides.

“Put me to bed. What a fine man I am to talk of love!” He smiled a little, twisted smile that curled to irony and died.

CHAPTER XXV

RICHARD WORDEN dreamed great dreams and was as ready to fight for them as if they had been practical realities. He believed in all that was staunch and clean and brave, all that was young and aspiring. He would have tried in his big, clumsy way to form a brotherhood of these strengths, to breed genius from such a brotherhood and to call such genius America. Love of sincerity was writ on the banner that was to wave above the young army, a sturdy faith in Puritan ancestry, an art taking its song from its motherland. This was the future upon which he had centered his ideals and hopes.

His scheme of an American Art University had seemed the first stone towards a Utopian Kingdom. He had dreamed of a paternal government, disinterested millionaires, the support of a grateful, young generation, the whole coalesced inspiration and attempt at some national expression. In the victory of giant buildings, giant speculations, giant enterprises, there must also be place for giant monuments of song in praise of a new and vanquishing

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race. To sing of America's rivers and mountains and formidable, smoke-blackened cities, of its people and their striving forward, of its social and artistic problems in its many States, here was material for musicians, sculptors, painters and writers.

With all the fortunes to be spent in education, Richard Worden believed in facilitating the means of being artists, rendering more practical the creative instinct in the young, upholding the poet, in other words, as well as the athlete or the business man. He would have lowered the screw of living, so as to make it possible for all classes to look and listen and feel encouraged in turn to lift their voices. He would have bred Walt Whitmans.

These were Richard Worden's dreams. But in the meanwhile, considered by most an eccentric fanatic, he continued earning his daily bread by making remarkably good busts of women who bored him; taking little of the proceeds of this ungrateful and fashionable form of anti-art for his bread and giving more pennies away than he could have been forced to acknowledge, pennies which found their secret destiny in the empty pockets of unsuccessful "young ones," as he called them.

Time had passed; the winter drifted away; the row of busts grew more imposing; he bullied the women who sat for them and who in consequence of his rough manners with them, arrived in flatter-

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ing and delightfully fluttered processions to his studio; and, as men do each year, he had grown older.

The truth of it was that Richard Worden's spirit had been broken, his heretofore indomitable energy sorely tried by the events preceding and following Nona's departure.

When Nona had introduced him to Allen Dietrich, he had felt that here was the man he needed, a man of brains with no profession or obligations and a nice fortune, a dilettante with the latent power to become some one more important. Allen talked convincingly, he knew the right people, he had been enthusiastic, and honest Richard believed that by his help the money might be raised, the university built. Already, visionary that he was, he saw himself life and soul in his chosen work, with Dietrich a worthy partner by his side. The beautiful buildings reared on the virgin soil of the West, teeming with earnest students, alive with a concentrated kinship of young art, directed and suggested by men such as he, devoted to the great enterprise. Why should it not be possible?

But then had come the slow suspicions and distrust in this man elected to work with him for the glory of the dream, and later the sick disappointment of finding his suspicions too well founded, the final condemnation of Allen Dietrich and Nona, the

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wife of his best friend. At first he had put himself aside in consideration of the tragedy befallen Sylvus. Like a huge faithful dog he had watched and waited on his friend. But when Sylvus no longer needed him as much, after Laura Dunn had put his violin back into the blind man's hands, Richard found time and solitude in which to face his own bitterness and disillusionment. It did not occur to him that he would ever again be able to accomplish what had, with Allen's help and influence, for a time seemed practical at last. It was characteristic of him that the day after Dietrich's and Nona's flight, he had telephoned the few men whom Dietrich had told him were seriously interested in the founding of the University and had volunteered financial support.

"This is Richard Worden," he growled to each. "Say, the Art College business is off. Not enough capital to float it," and before any of the prospective board of directors could answer him, he had rung off. Being busy men engaged in their own plans, they had willingly let the matter drop. So it came about that the patient dreams of the sculptor were left, as a half-built house in the country is sometimes abandoned for lack of funds, and its embryonic skeleton is haunted only by the architect, who, hands in his empty pockets, stands moodily contemplating what might have been a completed

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pile of stones, shaped in the image of his inspiration.

"I won't see it in my day," murmured Richard to himself and for hours he would sit motionless in his studio; his pipe full of ashes, staring at a little clay model of the buildings which in an optimistic hour, he had fashioned with careful, tender fingers.

Laura Dunn found him this way one day, shortly after the walk, when in his own gruff manner he had asked her to marry him. Laura, quiet and wise, had known then that he must be in a bad state of mind, and that it might be time for her to interfere. She arrived at his studio without warning. He opened the door with an ungracious face which lightened visibly when he saw who it was.

"I thought it was another d——n woman," he growled and Laura smiled at the compliment of his relief.

She stepped easily into the studio, her severe hat and tailor suit showing crisp contrast to Richard's disheveled, flaming crop of hair, and his long working-blouse.

There was something strong and of heroic proportions about Laura, which bred confidence. Her shoulders were almost masculinely broad and straight, her eyes were always clear.

"Busy?" she asked.

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"No." He sank heavily onto the divan and scowled at the little model he had had no time to hide.

She sat down uninvited in a worn wicker chair which bore many evidences of Richard's weight. "I've just been to see Sylvus. He's made up his mind to go on that tour."

"He told me so yesterday."

"Shall we go with him?" She pretended not to follow the direction of Richard's eyes to the miniature model.

"I don't know."

"Come now, Richard, this will never do. I've decided to take a holiday. You need one, too."

He did not answer for a moment and when he did his voice was vehement. "It's Hell to have pipe dreams, Athene!"

Her fine eyes surveyed him thoughtfully. "I know it is. Don't have them. Come, take a holiday."

"What's the use?" he groaned, suddenly abandoning all reserve. "The heart of things is smashed somehow and I've lost confidence since — since that cad made a mess of Sylvus's life and my faith. If a man like that failed, all the rest might."

"No."

"I had talked to some of the 'young ones' about it. Hate to fail them."

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"Bigger men than you have been disappointed in littler men than he."

"Oh, I'm no big man. I guess I've thought too much anyhow of what I could do. My country does n't need *me*."

"Of course, it needs you. Do you suppose that Dietrich's running away with Nona is even a drop in the ocean compared to what you've conceived, my friend? Do you think it depended on him, or depends on you, the *end* of such an idea? You surprise me, Richard."

"Well, what's the use?"

"It takes many millions of lives and evolutions of them to make a force heavy enough to move a reform. A few generations of such clean, decent men as you, and your dreams may come true. Don't be selfish enough to expect fulfilment necessarily during your life."

"I feel if it does n't go through now, it *never* will; as if I were carrying the responsibility of the 'young ones.'"

"You and others after you, when these young ones are old and others are young."

"Oh, that man! What he's done!" His face grew choleric with the kindled resentment of weeks.

"Why?"

He stared at her beneath shaggy eyebrows. "Do I have to explain why?"

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"He loves Nona, I daresay. I'm sorry for him. You know very little of men and women, my poor friend, especially women. Dietrich's not a hero, and Nona's a modern woman of a much-to-be-pitied type. I'm sorry for them both."

"Hope there are n't many like her."

Her smile was a little sad, a little weary. "There is hope for them all, Richard. They're not bad; they're stupid."

"It's a rotten world," he cried fiercely; "a bad world where such things can happen."

"Because of one foolish woman and one egoist you choose to call the world rotten? Where is your sense of balance?"

"I'm in no fit state to argue. You'd better leave me, Athene," he said moodily.

She rose from her chair. "I had — just now."

"I'm a brute. It was good of you to come."

She stood near the door. "Fight it out alone, but don't lose your faith in humanity. The world after all is a pretty wisely arranged place."

"I suppose so," he said wearily.

"Come on a holiday with Sylvus and me," she advised, and left him.

The next day it was he who sought her out.

"I've been thinking. I guess you're right: I'll go when you do," he announced.

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“It will not be for some time yet. You’ll have days to change your mind.”

“I won’t change my mind. I have some money laid by and I’m going to spend it all.”

She knew it was the modest sum he had saved intending to contribute it to the University, but she did not comment on what she knew. So the three, each in his separate manner, lived on through the remaining weeks and waited the day when they might leave America; the two men to escape their own loneliness; Laura because she knew they needed her.

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE are people to whom spring means only sunshine and joy of living, but there are others who, in the poignancy of its renascent sentiment, feel, as if at the roots of their own sensibilities, the compelling tug of flowers seeking warmth and light. Nona belonged to this latter type of beings. Spring always found her wistful and vaguely troubled. As a very young girl she had dreamed over the first feathering of grass and leaves, the fragile bloom of harbinger flowers; she had divined an ache in stirring gardens and fragrant rains. The city held for her at that season the quality of gardens.

But no month of May had ever been like this one in Paris, with its glory of open chestnut buds, its lilacs in heavy clusters ladening the air with thin, subtle breath. Here fountains played in a daffodil-tinting sun, the Seine took the color of crushed grapes, and soft shadows in deep, velvet pansy shades painted the streets; here in the many gardens flocked children and lovers and people who seemed to have nothing to do but amuse themselves.

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Nona wanted to be happy as women should be who love and are loved. Everything in the bewildering month of May suggested romance. She had expected some definite revelation in her relationship with Allen which would still for all time the too familiar restlessness of mind and soul. But it seemed as if the sense of anything permanently reposeful must always elude her. The very passions summoned by Allen with a glance from his keen, gray eyes or a touch of his hand or a word, left her in after reaction strangely self-conscious and unsatisfied. Life with him in the intervals when his violence did not command, remained the matter-of-fact affair it had started out to be as soon as they settled in the apartment. Such an existence which should have been the sweetest in tender understanding between a man and a woman who believed in love and one another, lacked a fundamental comradeship. It lacked also the mother impulse of the woman towards a man who needs her. Nona instinctively possessed the mother spirit and would have offered it to Allen in a thousand, subtle ways had she been encouraged, but the habit of his egoism, so long cynical and dominating, rejected, without meaning to offend, the wistful care and babying so dear to women, so necessary to the maternal well-spring in them.

He was, furthermore, growing bored and weary

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of student atmosphere and simple food. It seemed to him that her interest in these haunts of slovenly Bohemians and ill-complexioned women painters had become exaggerated.

"They're not our kind," he would say more and more peevishly.

"That's why I like to watch them," was her answer. She was learning many pitiless truths in the sordid, sadly twisted lives of these women and men.

But Allen had no wish to watch or learn from them such truths as might be applied to all struggling, ambitious humanity, and little by little he detached Nona from their surroundings, spending more of his time with her now away from the left bank of the river, on the big boulevards where swarmed quite a different type of life, and in the fashionable restaurants where they ran the risk of meeting Americans they might know. She found that she had grown callous at thought of these encounters with previous acquaintances, but that what had before amused and delighted her in the places where she might meet them, now vaguely made her unhappy. She would have preferred walking along the quais, her arm tucked in Allen's, dreaming with the wonder of those clear magic nights which drew the very soul of her timidly forward. She loved the romantic silhouettes of roof

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lines, the quaint clusters of chimneys resembling little men wearing helmets; she loved the soft blue shadows of the city domes and church steeples, the lights, the tiny dots in the distance; and most of all she loved the Seine, and would have lingered by it for hours, hushed by its impenetrable mantle of silence, watching its knotted muscles and thick veins work in mysterious convulsions beneath the sheen of its skin. It seemed to her a giant fighting to be free from the stabbing reflections of city lights; it was of darker blood than the sea but unable like the sea to break its furious voice against the rocks.

But Allen disliked the morbid fascination of such nocturnal wanderings. Secure in his fastidiousness and ideas of the decorative duties of women, he preferred Nona, her lips delicately rouged, her hair and hands tempting, her figure molded into some charming gown, smiling at him across the polished cloth of a well-set table, lights framing and waiters serving her. Then he was proud of her, and showed by the exquisite attention to her wants what a discreet man of the world and gallant lover he could be.

She often told herself that she must be ungrateful not to feel more fully satisfied by his courtly manners and slight insolences which in the old days would have thrilled her vanity. But she began to

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know what it was to be lonely with no tangible reason or excuse, in the month of May when everything about her whispered voluptuously and promisingly of love.

There was just one person who seemed to understand that things were not as they should be. That person was not Allen, content in his well-being, but the little Greek poet, Constantin Nicolaïdes, and for a while even he had dropped out of their lives, as they went so seldom now to lunch at the small restaurant where he had first met them.

But one day, uninvited, he came the second time for tea and she was undisguisedly glad to see him. So he came again and still again until it became a habit of his to arrive several afternoons in the week, always bringing for her a modest bunch of flowers, sweet-smelling garden ones of the humbler kind, for which she suspected he deprived himself of food.

Often Allen was not there when he arrived, and she found herself reaching an impulsive degree of intimacy with the pale, melancholy little man, who stared at her so somberly from out his large eyes and treated her with so small an affectation of anything approaching familiarity. There was about him an almost terrible, pitiless frailty, an indelible shadow as of some sinister fatality brooding over his brow. She felt that he was strangely detached

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from her own groping state of mind, and she grew to speak with him quite openly of herself and Allen, and in the end also of Sylvus. The first time she had spoken of Sylvus he had looked very grave and closed his eyes. "I understand him," he had murmured.

Later he said to her, "I am sorry you did leave him."

Then she was angry at him for daring to speak so of what was in the past, forgetting that it was she who had introduced the subject of Sylvus. She felt nervously that he did not like Allen. When Allen was with them, the little Greek would sit silent most of the time, staring at the open window with its view of sky, or at her as she busied herself making tea. Once the light streamed through the curtains and caught fire in her hair, when she bent over the samovar.

Constantin shot his hand out with the now familiar gesture. "Stay there. It is so alive, your hair in the sun."

She laughed, not quite at her ease, darting a rapid side glance at Allen, who had long since ceased even to pretend to like the poet and who resented always finding this man with Nona in the afternoons when, after an hour spent among his book shops, he came home.

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"That Greek is hanging around too much," he told her at last.

"He's lonely," she said.

"He'll have to get some one else to spend his time with. I won't have him hanging around you. Better hint to him, Nona."

It was the first definite warning of his right to dictate concerning her relationship with other men, and feeling innocent and challenged in her pride as a grown-up woman able to take care of herself, she answered sharply. She did not want to hurt the already sensitive soul of her strange friend by any attitude which seemed to put them all in a false position. Yet at the bottom of her heart, wishing to be just, she could not entirely blame Allen's point of view. The fact of what she was to him would for the remainder of her life give him reason to suspect her moral strength. She was, therefore, sorely perplexed what to do.

The little poet spared her the pain of any inhospitality. He did not come to see her for several days. She began to wonder where he was and if he had guessed Allen's animosity.

Then one morning she received a pathetic letter from him, telling her that he had been very ill and begging her to come to him. The last sentence in the letter puzzled her.

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“Come soon. It is my humble prayer, my only friend, before the plant which I have bought a few days ago does wither.”

She thrust the letter in her portfolio on the writing table, with a gesture of putting it out of sight before Allen should come home, telling herself none the less that she would certainly show it him. She was sure that he would not allow her to go to Constantin.

The last sentence of his letter haunted her. There had been a note of strange, urgent appeal in his request. As the day wore away she found herself sorrier and sorrier for the poor little man waiting for her, ill and alone. If Allen would only understand! Knowing that he would not, she did not after all give him the letter to read when he came home. Only when the next afternoon he left her again to wander on the quais, fingering the books in the open stalls, she thought of Constantin and wondered if it would be too late to go, if the plant had withered. What had he meant? Then before she had realized the full significance of incurring Allen's certain displeasure or of deceiving him, she was on her way to her sick friend, her heart beating more quickly at the daring of the adventure, her head held high with resolve.

The poet lived on the rue St. Sulpice at the very top floor of an old house with iron doors. She

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climbed six flights of stairs, rang the bell and leaned breathless against the wall.

She rang twice before he answered. The tips of her fingers felt curiously cold, and the nerves of her spine sent curly messages up and down her back. Her cheeks were fiery red. She held more tightly the big bunch of tulips she had brought.

But when Constantin opened the door and she saw him, she was glad that she had come. He was so small, so sucked of blood, so brittle looking that all her mother instincts were aroused.

"I've come," she said simply.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE little poet's room was tiny and clean. The heart of it lay in its window, cared for like a shrine, curtainless so that the light might find free entrance. It was one of those windows perched high in the brow of old houses. At dusk, seen from the street, it would be just an eye with a single light suggesting a lamp and a lonely vigil. It was sunk back in its orbit, sheltered by the protruding roof and it looked out upon the round towers of St. Sulpice. A small table stood close to it holding a white rose plant, which was withering in the last afternoon rays.

"You have come in time, my little friend," said Constantin and pointed to the rose. "It was a plant of only a few sous, so it could not live forever—it is like me." He took both her hands in his cold ones, his large mournful eyes staring at her. "My little friend," he said.

Looking around her, registering the narrow, ascetic bed in the corner, the bare writing table littered with papers, the two simple chairs, the carpetless floor and the only photograph in the room,—

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one of a beautiful, dark-haired woman,— she felt a gathering ache at her heart, the smart of a repressed tear in her eyes. But she tried to speak cheerfully. “You must get well.”

“I have decided to get well,” he said and stared at her.

She took off her gloves and veil and went towards him. “Now I’ve come to see you, you’re going to sit down and we’ll talk.” As if he had been a child, she settled him back in the most comfortable chair near the window. “Here are these tulips I brought you — here is a pillow and a cover — now lean back and let’s talk.”

He obeyed her, closing his eyes wearily for a moment. “That is a picture of my mother you see on the table,” he murmured. “She is dead.”

She went over and taking it up looked long at the tragic face which stared at her with Constantin’s eyes. “How beautiful she was!”

“She was a peasant, born in Delphi. The gods loved her until she married,” he said simply. “I remember her always carrying a huge gray fur muff — her hands were cold like mine — even in summer. She was a lily. My father never knew why she died.”

“Poor lady!” Nona put the photograph gently in its place.

“She loved me. She rocked me as a child in her

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arms and sang old Greek songs of the mountains. There was prophecy in her eyes. She is the only one who ever understood."

"And your father?" she could not help asking, "you ought to let him know — it seems to me."

"My father would not even trouble to come to my funeral," he said.

"You shouldn't speak that way. You don't know."

"He was not at my mother's."

"Why did you want me to come before the plant withered?" She saw that to talk further of his father was to give him pain.

"You will know that to-morrow. It will be withered."

"I'm afraid of you to-day," she cried suddenly. "Are you so ill? Have you had a doctor? Oh, dear, is n't there something I can *do*. It all seems so sad!"

"You must not be sorry for me."

"I think I'm sorry for every one." She spoke impulsively, more to herself than to him.

"You are younger than the God who decrees." He fingered the rich, yellow tulips with his thin hands.

She came nearer him. "Don't you wish sometimes you knew what was right and what was wrong?" she began eagerly. "Don't you ever feel

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hopelessly mixed up about things which ought to be clear?"

"No. But you are still a child." He stared out of the window as he spoke, and his voice was that in which one addresses a child. "My mother once said to me, 'Starve your body until it grows transparent like glass. Then you will see your soul.' There lies the truth and the truth of each of us is right."

She leaned forward, her hands pressed against the window pane.

"What if I shall always be too young to recognize the truth of what I am and what I want?"

"Then," he said slowly, "your youth will be the truth for you — whatever it does — whatever love song or dirge it sings."

"I feel very wicked," she confessed suddenly and looked at him with parted lips and troubled eyes. "I feel wicked to myself and to Allen and to Sylvus."

Constantin thought for a moment, raising himself straight in his chair. "Poor child. Let me see if I can help you. Tell me what is the most beautiful thing in the world to you?"

"I don't know."

"That is why you feel wicked, because you do not know. Find the most beautiful thing in the world, the one you think is most beautiful, worship

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it and you will be true to a god and not be wicked again."

He smiled quite brightly at her. "I know the most beautiful thing in the world, but it would not be for you — not that."

"Tell me! Do tell me what it is for you!"

He shook his head. "When the plant is withered I shall come to it. A foolish game for a poet."

A chill came to her heart; she turned from the window and walked back to his writing table where stood the photograph of his mother. There seemed a note of destiny in the room, like the tones of a church bell. She knew that all her life she would remember what Constantin told her this afternoon.

"I am glad that you did come. It was good of you. I wanted to see you, to see the warmth and life of your hair and to tell you just what I *have* told you about the most beautiful thing," he said.

A small watch lay face up on the table, ticking feebly. She bent over to look at it. It marked an hour which suddenly electrified her with a fear strangely familiar, the same panic she used to have when the clocks struck seven a long time ago and she had to remember that Sylvus was waiting. Now the panic was keener, more acute, for it was not patient Sylvus who would be waiting. She flew to the bed, and seizing her veil and gloves prepared for

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speedy leave taking, but just then Constantin began to cough.

It was a terrible cough which seemed to come from the center of some emptiness and tear its way out in a split, hacking noise that chopped from his lips and shook him like a dried leaf. He put his handkerchief up to his mouth. Staring at him, pale with horror, she imagined a stain left upon it. The small watch on the table seemed to tick louder, inexorable, but she no longer heeded it. Common humanity forbade her leaving him while he coughed. She circled about him, agitated and troubled, not knowing what she should do to relieve him.

The paroxysm subsided gradually. His head rolled back on the pillow at last; he tried to smile at her. "I ask you to forgive me for coughing so."

"I can't bear to hear you cough like that. I can't," she wailed. "You must have a doctor. I shall send you one."

"That is not — the most beautiful thing in the world," he whispered, hardly able to speak.

"Oh, dear, it's late. I ought to go. What shall I *do*? I can't leave you this way."

He beckoned her close to him and took her hand. "Adieu!" he said.

"I hate to go — I feel it's terrible to go but

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he will be furious. I'll come again. I'll come to-morrow."

The little watch on the table was ticking on. Allen would be very angry. He had often forbidden her to stay out alone after six. She would not lie to him about where she had been and she did not know how the truth would sound to him.

"I'll come to-morrow," she said again.

"There will be no use to come, *ma petite amie*."

She could see that he was so exhausted that it was hard for him to talk further.

"What do you *mean*?" she cried. "I shall send a doctor, anyway, even if I don't come."

The shadow of a repressed, inner thought which seemed to amuse him greatly played for a second in his eyes. "Yes, if you wish, send a doctor."

She stood in the door now, perplexed and worried. "I hate to leave you this way. Promise me you will take care of yourself—you will do nothing foolish?"

"Nothing foolish— Remember always, try to find the most beautiful thing and *never be afraid*. Adieu, *ma jolie*!" He turned his head on the pillow and looked out of the window, no longer at her, as if he wished to make her going easier.

She closed the door gently, but as soon as she was on the stairs her will keyed itself to a wild sense of hurry. She could not fly fast enough down

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the six flights, steadying herself with a hand on the wall.

The stairs were steep and had many curves.

Passing the *loge* of the concierge, she hesitated a moment, then with sudden decision rapped on the door. The concierge was a mean-looking, little woman, shriveled like a seed which has lain too long in the dark. She envisaged Nona with the animosity of a respectable woman towards one whose honesty she suspects.

“Madame,” said Nona, in her halting French, “the young man on the sixth floor, Monsieur Nicolaïdes, is very ill — *très malade* — Will you go up once in a while and look after him?”

“If Mademoiselle thinks that I have time to climb six flights for that — and me alone in the *loge*. If it were to nurse all my sick *locataires*. *En voilà une idée!*” snapped the concierge.

Nona fumbled in her purse and flung a five-franc piece on the table. Then on a bit of paper she found in her bag, snatching a pencil from the table, she wrote, “Madame Dietrich — 55 rue du Cherche Midi.” “Here,” she said sternly, “I pay you for climbing the six flights. Will you go now? I will give you more money later if you are good to him. If — if you should need any one — if he should be worse — here is my name and address.”

The concierge’s manner at sight of the silver had

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changed. Her withered lips twisted into a smile which nearly cracked them. She courtesied. "*Oui, Madame.* Madame can be sure that I will wait upon the poor one."

But Nona had not waited to hear her finish her protestations. In great anxiety at the fleeting hour, possessed once more with her own apprehensions, she questioned the street for sight of the quickest means of transport home. There were no motor cabs, nor even fiacres. She hurried across to the Square of St. Sulpice where she found a rickety open carriage, with a fat, red-nosed coachman lazing on the box.

It was the late warmth and light of a May evening. Motors like huge, noisy insects swooped past her slow, trundling conveyance and its stumbling horse. Everything and everybody else seemed to be moving faster. She leaned forward, craning her neck to one side, so that she could watch their slow progress, her foot tapping nervously the rotting bottom of the carriage.

She had never yet disobeyed Allen and she found that she was more afraid of him than she had ever been of any one in her life. The thought of Constantin, too, lay heavily on her heart and hammered forebodings in uneven rhythm to her own trouble.

"He'll do something foolish — oh, he will!" she said aloud, and for an impulsive moment was

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tempted to rush back and prevent the thing of which she was afraid. Then she could not help thinking that after all it was too late and that when she told Allen what she had done, and why, and her fears for the poor, lonely, little poet, he would understand and forgive her and perhaps come back with her.

With a thrill of relief, she saw that they had come at last to the corner of her street. It was now only a question of moments.

The courtyard was darkening. She could see light shining from her windows.

At her quick, sharp ring, Allen opened the door and stood before her coldly, his watch in an up-turned palm, and in the other hand a crumpled letter which in the hall gas-light she recognized at once as Constantin's — the one he had sent her the day before.

Out of breath from her race up the stairs, she could not speak.

"Where have you been?" His voice was as cold as the expression on his face.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE followed her into their sitting-room, laid the watch and the crumpled letter on the table. Then striding to where she stood aghast, he wheeled her about, facing him.

“I’m waiting to hear,” he said sharply.

She straightened, held her head high and looked him in the eyes. “I’ve been to see Constantin Nicolaïdes. He’s very ill.”

The hold of his hand on her arm tightened; in the soft lamp-light his face showed harsh, unpleasant lines, his eyes questioned, mercilessly piercing the thin mesh of her veil. “And what were you doing at Nicolaïdes’? You know my wishes about him?”

“He’s ill, I tell you, Allen. Let me go. You hurt me.”

“Really! Is that why you hid his letter? Is that why you deceived me by not telling me where you were going this afternoon? A nice thing it was for me to come home and find you gone with no explanation. What do you take me for? A fool, like your husband was? You make a great mistake, then!”

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“Oh!” she cried out, wrenching free from him. A flush of anger flew to her cheeks. “You need n’t mention *him*! How can you, Allen! How can you be so *vulgar*!”

The brutal allusion to Sylvus, the sneering disbelief in Allen’s voice were maddening, a challenge to open rebellion. Where she would have felt contrite and begged forgiveness for what she acknowledged to have been a deliberate deception on her part in regard to the letter, now she was ready to let him think as he chose and to bear with the consequences.

He went over to the table and rapped the letter with imperious fingers. “You misuse your words. I’m never vulgar nor am I given to spying. I found this by chance. I got home early and wanted to write a letter, and took the liberty of hunting for an envelope in your portfolio. Letters to you are rare enough,” his voice was bitingly ironical; “my interest in this one is pardonable.”

“I was n’t going to lie about it to you.”

“That, unfortunately, cannot be proven.”

“Why, what do you *think* — what do you *mean* — ?” her voice was choked by the intensity of an indignation which held a slight sense of guilt, a consciousness of the miserable letter which she had hidden from him.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I think what I *see*

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— no more. There is, you 'll admit, a certain irony in the situation. I 've been waiting here for you an hour with this letter before me — can you realize the similarity of this with days we both remember? A woman like you who has allowed one man — excuse me if I am indelicate, but the occasion warrants plain speaking — one man not her husband to make love to her, might be tempted to repeat the experiment. I confess I never in my vanity thought it possible until to-day."

She tore off her hat and veil and flung them on the divan. "You know better than that — you ought to know better — you — you *brute!*"

"Here is this Greek," he continued, leaning against the table and tearing the letter to bits. "Of course he 's in love with you, or why should he write to you to come and see him? You could hardly believe that I would approve of your going alone to his rooms, could you? How do I know how many times you 've been there before?"

"Oh, that 's it!"

"Is it so strange that it should be one of my first thoughts?" his voice rose harshly. "I 'm no fool, I 'm not *blind!* Do you think I 'm a plaything, my dear? Do you think you can be mine and go off like that with other men?"

She flew over to him and seizing his arm shook it with all her strength. "Listen to me! Listen

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to me, Allen! I went to see him for the first time to-day. Do you hear me? — the *first!* — and I went *knowing* you would not like it.”

“*Like* it! What man —”

“Wait a moment — I went expecting to tell you afterwards — you can believe me or not, but it’s the truth. And another thing — he’s not in love with me — I’m the only friend he’s got, and he’s very ill — dying.” Suddenly her face screwed itself up like a child’s about to cry. She let go of his arm and wrung her hands. “Oh, how *can* you? I’m sorry I did n’t show you the old letter — only if I had, the poor, lonely, little man would have waited with no one —”

“So you acknowledge that I would n’t have countenanced such a thing?”

“Of course, I acknowledge it! What more can I *do* than say I’m sorry I was late, but I could n’t help it. Oh, it was terrible — terrible!” She hid her face in her hands. “He was coughing and coughing and he could n’t stop and it was so late — and I did n’t know what to *do*. I’m afraid of his being there alone — I’m afraid of what he’ll do. He may *kill* himself, Allen!”

“Kill himself! Nonsense!” He stood beside her, pulling savagely at his mustache, his first anger subsiding as the conviction of her sincerity became stronger. “Stop crying. They’ll hear you all over

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the house." He went to the window and shut it, while drooping and woebegone she sobbed on, her hands to her face.

"Nona!"

Suddenly he walked over to her, put his arm around her and led her to the divan. "Nona, stop crying."

She let him pull her down beside him but kept her hands to her face. "You've been — brutal and mean to me."

"You've worried and driven me almost mad to-day. We won't talk of it any more — I forgive you."

"You need n't!"

"I forgive you," he insisted. "But, understand me, it's only because I'm beginning to see that you're nothing but a foolish, irresponsible child who's got to be taken care of every minute. But I want you to know that there can be no more *friendships* with other men, however innocent on your part they may be. You must realize *my* position in such a case. . . ."

"You're all alike you — men," she burst forth, raising herself on the divan and moving away from him. "It's always a question of your pitiful vanity! Even if a thing like that is innocent, as you said yourself, if it makes you *look* small, you resent it almost as much — as if it were worse."

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"You are talking hastily without realizing what you're saying, Nona. Believe me that we owe it as a protection to our wives as well as to ourselves to mistrust — the other man."

"You had no right to remind me — of certain things —" she went on angrily. "You had no right to accuse me!"

"As far as right goes I think you've *given* me every right."

She turned tear-stained cheeks and reddened eyes to him. "You should have *known*!"

"My dear child, how could I *know* anything!" He tried to draw her to him again.

She yielded passively, her head limp on his shoulder. Suddenly without warning she began to cry again. She was thinking of Constantin. "He *will* —" she murmured. "He will kill himself."

"He'll do nothing of the kind. There now! Don't begin all over again. Come, powder your nose, dear, and put on your hat and we'll go out and have some dinner."

"Allen, let's go to him. Come with me. I don't want any dinner. Perhaps if you go —"

"Nothing of the kind!" His tone was final. "Don't get me angry again by insisting in that quarter."

"If anything happens —"

"I tell you nothing will."

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"Well, I don't want any dinner. I won't go out at all then."

"You *must* eat."

"I won't go out." She lay obstinately on the divan and neither arguments nor coaxing prevailed upon her.

Finally he rose and went to the door. "Well, if you want to be a silly child, Nona, I'll go and bring something back for you. I insist upon your eating."

"Oh, all right," she said lifelessly.

When the door closed behind him she drew herself up and sat motionless, unambitious beneath fatigue of muscle and mind. She did not want to move or to think. It seemed as if there were no measure to the time she could sit content in the animal reaction of will and body.

But suddenly the bell rang, jolting her passive state of lethargy into a startled and renewed sense of responsibility. It kept on ringing as if the person on the other side of the door could not wait.

She rose slowly and putting her hands to her collar and to her hair, strove in a rather dazed instant to collect her wits and control.

A woman with a shawl over her head stood in the outside hall, a finger on the bell. She was suffocating and panting for breath from the climb up the stairs, and was evidently laboring under some overwhelming agitation.

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It was the concierge of the rue St. Sulpice.

“Madame! Madame!” she cried when she saw Nona. Her voice wheezed from her throat, her wrinkled face twisted in terror, her hands jerked forward. “Madame, he has hung himself!”

Nona shrank back against the wall.

“*Dieu!*” whimpered the woman, “to think of it!” She came near to Nona and babbled on with violent, uncontrolled gestures. “When Madame had gone, I did go up the six flights of stairs to see the poor young man. He was sitting in a chair and he did tell me to go away. Again later I went bringing a little soup, of my own soup which I had made myself. *Mon Dieu!* he was dead Madame — so!” She stretched out her tongue in ghastly mimicry. “He hung swinging from a rope in the window. *Mon Dieu!* I shiver yet only at the remembering of it. I did drop my best soup plate, Madame, in which was the soup for him and I screamed —”

“I knew he would,” murmured Nona. “Did n’t you make sure that he was really dead?” she shuddered.

“I to touch a hanged one!” she crossed herself. “Oh, Madame, I did scream and run away. Was the poor young man so very unhappy that he should do this thing?” Her small, shrewd eyes watched Nona.

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"I don't know," whispered Nona. She was shivering now as with the ague.

"I have run all the way to Madame," went on the woman. "I did leave a neighbor in the *loge*. This will be a sad thing for the house, Madame — if it is known that there was a hanged one there."

Some one was coming up the stairs. She turned eagerly, hoping for another listener to her gruesome story.

It was Allen. When he saw the woman standing there, and Nona half hidden in the shadows of her own hall, bent into a shuddering little knot suggesting disaster of some kind, he hurried forward.

"What is it? Who is this person, Nona?"

The concierge began volubly explaining. He listened in silence to the main points of her recital, then cutting short the details she had not spared Nona, he brushed by her and reached Nona's side.

"I'll go with you," he said briefly. "Wait for me a second."

As if driven to sudden action by his presence, Nona darted into the sitting-room and with trembling hands began pinning on her hat.

"Here, dear! What are you doing? You're surely not coming too. It's no place for *you*," he said to her.

"He's *my* friend," she cried and violent all at

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once with the realization of the tragedy which had passed so near her that day, she turned and faced him, her mouth tense, her hands doubled to fists.

"While we were *quarreling*, he did it," she went on wretchedly. "While you were saying those stupid, ugly things—I shall never forget now, never forgive ourselves. We should have gone to him. You should have believed me."

"We could n't have helped it," he retorted.

"We might have. It's a sick mess, that's what it is. I knew all along that he meant *that*—for him the most beautiful thing—but I did n't think so quickly—" She was growing incoherent.

"Don't take it so hard, dear. She'll hear."

"Well, let's go. There is no use of your trying to prevent my going, and I suppose you don't mind—now."

He took her arm kindly. "If you look at it that way, why of course you can go. But it's foolish of you. He won't be—a pretty sight!"

"He's taught me many things—" she said slowly. "It's the least I can do."

The three of them climbed into an open fiacre which reminded her miserably of the one in which she had hurried home such a short while ago, and the drive was accomplished in silence, the woman awed to quiet by Allen's curt treatment of her.

They mounted the six flights of stairs and reached

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the door where Nona had stood that same afternoon holding the bunch of tulips. Then Allen took her gently by the arm and together they went into the room.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE little poet had found what was to him the most beautiful thing in the world, and that was to leave it. No one could argue false gods or demonstrate to him how wrong it was to hang oneself in one's window, and perhaps being beyond the reach of argument was the greatest comfort of all.

Nona did not philosophize on his death, as she might have done, nor did she question his right to have chosen the accomplishing of what he considered his destiny, in spite of the inconsistency of his proper will taking charge of his fatalism. He had come and gone in her life like an incident, like the many travelers one meets on a voyage whose faces become strangely familiar within a short space of time, whose influence may even later prove significant, but who pass in a night, leaving doubt as to what was the use of their being introduced into the scene at all.

Yet once the short, dramatic moment of realizing his exit from things was over, she found that he had left a more profound and lasting impression on her soul than she could have thought pos-

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sible. It was as if he were fused by remembered words and silences into the secret shadow of her thoughts; the recollection of that last time she had seen him living; his mysterious decision half-divined and feared by her; the gentleness of his counsel; the bidding good-by, as it were, on the threshold of the parting place; these things stayed with her, and even dead, a tragedy well aside from her own problem, he seemed suddenly now to have taken an active part in the directing of her thoughts.

Allen was shut out from the intimate results of her friend's passing, although she could not deny that Allen was being very decent about the practical business of getting the poor, lonely shell of a body buried. It was he who attended the formality of an inquest, who went through Constantin's papers, found the father's address and telegraphed the news to Athens.

Nona smiled bitterly at the answer to this telegram, remembering Constantin's few dismissing words on the subject of his father. The answer was enough money for a nice funeral and a decent tombstone, with the eloquent explanation, "To bury my son." Not even a word of gratitude for the strangers who were occupying themselves with this tragic task.

The day of the funeral dawned perfect and warm, a day when the streets shone like silver

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ribbons in the sun and the people in the streets took butterfly colors. Nona in black went out alone early that morning to buy flowers. Passing through the courtyard, chance had it that she met for the first time a blind man being led to the Eye Hospital. He was an old, old man with an evil face. He leaned on a stick and was guided by a young woman in deep mourning. Nona stood still and watched him, thinking how ugly he looked and how glad she was that she could not see his eyes. She was sure they would be wicked eyes. Suddenly she imagined Sylvus, tall and gentle and gaunt, walking beside him. How different were the two men, and yet both were blind!

She thought of Sylvus all the way to the tiny flower shop where an old woman who was a friend of hers would minister to her wishes for the flowers which were to make Constantin's last trip through Paris a spring-scented one.

"I want yellow flowers, as many as you have, for some one who is dead," she told this very old woman, who sidled around her tiny shop like a crab in its cave.

"I will then make you a beautiful white wreath of roses," croaked the old woman. "One must have a wreath upon such an occasion."

"No, I want yellow flowers in bunches," insisted Nona.

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As she stood in the doorway her arms laden with a sunny burden, she could not help staring at the blue sky and confiding to the old woman. "It is not a day upon which to be dead, Madame."

The decrepit crone shook her head. "As well to-day as any other," she mumbled. "For me, I should like to die in summer. It will be warm."

Nona walked slowly away toward the rue St. Sulpice. It seemed impossible to her youth and vigor that any one should be missing on a day like this. She wondered with a tenacious love of touch and breath, if worship of life was not the most beautiful thing in the world, and she stared down at the flowers tenderly.

All at once she felt some one come up behind her and take her arm. It was Allen. She had forgotten about him during the short walk to the florists.

"I followed you, dear," he said. "Here, give me those to carry."

"No, I like to have them." She hugged the flowers to her and stared up at him. He was dressed in dark clothes and carried a gold-headed cane. He walked easily, breathing in the sweet air with evident pleasure, and chatting of many things which had nothing to do with problems of life and death. It did not shock her that his face would not fall into the conventional expression of mourning

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suitable to a man who was going to a funeral. She herself felt curiously detached, as if the more or less grim business ahead of them was an unimportant appendage to what had passed. The real moment of horror and distress for her had been when the concierge had so sensationally announced the suicide of the man over whom she and Allen had been quarreling at the very time probably when it was happening.

But Allen walking beside her seemed far away from her mood, not because she was pensive and he nonchalant, but because he had no share in the world of thought into which she had been plunged before he joined her that morning, and she saw no use nor reason for explaining to him Constantin's haunting advice about the most beautiful thing in the world. So after a few very casual remarks from Allen, answered absent-mindedly, they fell into a divided silence which lasted until they reached the house on the rue St. Sulpice.

Now what remained of Constantin went soberly and simply to the cemetery of Montparnasse in a black-draped carriage driven by black horses accompanied by a few undertakers with the paid, lugubrious faces of professional mourners, two in front, two behind, and after them trudged Constantin's only other mourners—a man and a woman who had arrived at the last moment,

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strangers to Nona, and who, without a word, had taken modest places behind the hearse.

The man was evidently a painter, with a long beard and kind eyes. He was shabbily dressed as some artists still dress in the Quarter, with respect to Murger's immortal Bohemians; his felt hat, flowing tie and wide trousers seemed to be pathetically genuine, and did not give the impression of filling a picturesque rôle from a sense of fitness. He carried with careful hand a two-sou bunch of violets. The woman might have been a model. She was dressed in black which somehow did not convince as mourning. She wore a close-fitting bonnet of straw like a baby cap, its edge bound with ribbon and a faded bunch of artificial pink roses drooping on the side; her hair was parted and drawn in light yellow bands over her forehead and ears, her black coat was long and loose-fitting, her shoes too pointed and worn. She was very thin, with a young face, not incurably weary. Allen and Nona in a closed motor cab followed this bizarre couple.

To Nona it was all strange and unreal. She could not help feeling that either she and Allen or the two on foot were incongruous as mourners, or was it possible that they all, by some shuffling process of unsnobbish humanity, belonged here together at the grave of the poet! A secret warmth welled to her heart and for the first time that day

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tears came, softly ready to fall. She wished that she had asked the two to come in their carriage, and she wondered if the girl were very tired and sad. But as she glanced at Allen, ill at ease and covertly bored, she realized that any idea of sharing the comfort of the motor with these people of another world would have been impossible.

"I wish this was over," he murmured once.

The sun shone brightly down on the black, turning the dusty, heavy draperies of the hearse to blue. A small breeze played with the horses' ebony trimmings. As they passed along the street, a few people turned to stare, men bared their heads in mechanical homage and women crossed themselves, but life trotted on just the same when the short procession had gone by.

At the grave they all four stood together, Nona beside the girl who was weeping convulsively.

"Don't," she whispered at last, touching the girl's arm.

The girl stared at her without answer, then made the sign of the cross and knelt. Nona felt rebuked as if she too should be sobbing her heart out, and was surprised at herself for remaining so unemotional. She wondered why Allen needed to lean over and whisper anxiously, "You're not going to faint, are you, Nona?" His suggestion brought a stupid dizziness to her head, and she was

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glad of the support of his arm. When it was all over and she found herself standing outside the cemetery, the painter and the girl had quietly vanished, as if they had never been.

"Shall we keep the motor?" questioned Allen, courteously waiting her pleasure. "Poor kitten! I suggest we walk a bit. The air will do you good. We'll go somewhere and have a drink — What do you say? I need one."

"Yes, send the machine away," she murmured, "but please don't let's go to a café, Allen. I must be in some quiet place for a while. Would you mind coming to the Luxembourg Gardens?"

"Whatever you want," he said, but the idea of the Gardens did not seem to enchant him.

They walked very slowly, in accordance to her wish. He did not try to talk with her; she was feeling dazed and only asked to be left alone. It was hard to realize that the thing was definitely finished, or in fact that it had ever happened. Constantin was dead. If she went to his room now she would not find him; if she went to the restaurant where he always used to eat, she could not find him. Nowhere in the sunshine, in the streets, in the houses, in all the world would she ever see him again. It fascinated her as a proof of the relentlessness, the finality of death. She would always remember him sitting by his window, his head

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against the pillow, his large, somber eyes staring at the rich tints of her hair, his hands playing with the yellow tulips, and she would always remember his words, "My mother used to say, 'Starve your body until it is transparent, then you will see your soul and the truth.'"

But she could never starve her body, symbolically speaking, while she was with Allen. He had grown tired of walking in silence. Now he interrupted her thoughts. "That was n't a bad looking girl," he said. "I would n't have suspected the little fellow —"

She looked at him and her look rebukingly reminded him of much.

"Oh, well," he concluded hastily.

The Gardens lay cool and a-light beneath the branching roof of leaves. The big fountain spouted silver which shattered into radiant, iridescent veils of spray, the statues gleamed white or retreated to shadows of soft blue-gray, the long alley-ways fluttered off to vistas of feathery foliage. The round towers of St. Sulpice were cut clear against the sky, and the dome of the Pantheon glittered. Here in these Gardens were painters squatting in front of their easels, children swarming in bright patches of color and noise, lovers strolling in pairs, students and young girls with music rolls, workmen passing, all the jumbled,

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happy-go-lucky, brilliant crowds of men and women following their pleasure or their despair beneath the golden sunshine.

Nona leaned against the stone balustrade of the terrace. She wanted to remain quiet, to let the sun warm her, the life about her divert her mind from its working.

Allen waited patient beside her for a certain time, then yawned deliberately. "Nona darling, aren't you tired now?"

She roused herself then and noticed that he was looking bored and restless.

"I think we both need a change, and I propose we jump into a motor and run over to the Café Américain for lunch," he said.

"Very well," she acquiesced without regret or interest and led the way out of the Gardens. After all it did not much matter what they did.

Allen enjoyed his lunch. He enjoyed it as a man may who feels he has deserved something pleasant. Nona looking at his face ironed out as it was by his most charming smile, could not help, in her state of rather morbid passivity, trying to reconstruct the harsh, violent lines which were a just palpable framework of his mouth and which only showed undisguised when he was angry. It was these lines that, so to speak, pulled his expression together beneath his every-day mask of polite

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weariness in life; it was the divined knowledge of these lines, in fact, which at first had aroused her curiosity and vanity.

"What are you thinking of, Nona?" He had noticed her looking at him.

"Nothing."

"Cheer up, my pretty."

She smiled faintly, "I will."

After lunch they strolled up the Boulevard and crossed to the rue de la Paix. Nona disliked this street, although when she first came to Paris it had seemed to represent all the temptations and wonder of magic shops such as she loved. But now her mood was changed. The famous rue de la Paix no longer convinced her or caught with answering glitter the enthusiasm of her eyes. She felt it to be the place where the people she used to know would be at home, and she resented it and them for such obvious association. But Allen wanted to walk there, and since he had been so kind about Constantin's funeral she could afford to go with him in turn where he wished. The rest of the day must be his. In this atmosphere she could not summon memory of the poet and his tiny room, or the man and woman who had followed behind the hearse, or the Luxembourg Gardens, so she allowed herself to drift into a blank state of negative silence.

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Allen was really being very nice. Once he asked her, "Do you see anything you like that's not *too* ambitious? We've been so reasonable lately that I *could* indulge a whim of yours."

She examined conscientiously a jeweler's display in front of which they were standing at the time, but could discover nothing which would give her particular pleasure. Allen seemed disappointed.

"I'll buy you some artificial gardenias then at Lespiaut's," he said. "They'll look well with your black."

They started accordingly, crossing the Place Vendôme. An automobile slowed down as it passed them. Nona glanced up.

In the automobile, staring at her, was Mrs. Mitchell and at Mrs. Mitchell's side, more impassive than ever, sat Petroff. There was a single moment, suspended and frozen, then the automobile accelerated its pace and swept on, leaving as if blotted in the air, an after-image of the two faces, Mrs. Mitchell's, blank and frigid, Petroff with a faint smile, a ghost of one long ago, when he had played the piano and stared at Nona and Allen across the jonquil haze of the brown room.

CHAPTER XXX

PETROFF'S smile was like a sudden crack running across a closed, wooden door — a crack which seemed to question the solidity of the door, a crack through which could be seen as on a sheet, magic-lantern pictures of vivid life size, scenes and faces she most wished to forget. One picture dissolved into another quickly. She saw the evening of Dorothy Mitchell's party. Dorothy Mitchell, the hostess, all smiles and warmth, pointing to two chairs in a corner for Allen and herself; Dorothy Mitchell's whispers behind her fan, her conscious allusion to Allen, her frivolous eyes, her desire at any cost to have her guests amuse themselves; she saw Worden's huge figure among the lights and flowers of this party; Petroff and de Lalmes, the Frenchman; Allen's eyes as they were when she had hummed that vulgar little French song in chorus with the youth who sang; and Sylvus in his corner. She saw Sylvus as a man in a cinematograph film, moving from one pose to another, now his eyes closed playing his violin, bowing slightly to imagined applause of an invisible audience, now

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stretching out his arms in a strangely violent appeal. . . .

"Nona."

They were standing beneath the column of the Place Vendôme. Allen, very pale, was shaking her by the arm. "You narrowly escaped being run over. Are you going to faint? You saw them?"

"Run over!" she repeated stupidly. It seemed hours since they had started to cross the square.

"Did you see them, Mrs. Mitchell and Petroff?"

"Yes."

"Poor Nona. I got you across. You didn't seem to know what you were doing. You've stood here staring into space for quite some seconds."

"I'm sorry."

"These last days have really been too much for you. It's too bad you had to meet *them* to-day. Here, I'll call this carriage and we'll go home, shall we?"

"Yes."

The drive seemed endless. But when it seemed as if they would never arrive, Allen touched her arm and said, "Here we are at last!" She climbed slowly their five flights of stairs, her hand sliding up the curves of the banisters, her head drooping.

Once in the little apartment, so sunny and bright

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this clear afternoon, she trailed into her room and lay on the bed, her face turned towards the open window.

Across the courtyard were other houses with many windows and low, undulating roof-lines, broken irregularly by hooded chimneys. Birds skimmed the shining space of sky. Below, to one side of the courtyard, a small garden bloomed gay. Yellow rays filtered through the white curtains and danced on the wall of the room.

Nona closed her eyes. She had not enough energy to ask Allen to draw the shutters, but she would have preferred to be without light or sound. She had been grateful to him when he had without question left her alone.

Then behind her closed eyes weariless processions of people and things began tramping; into her head stole the wail of a violin. It seemed as if her soul took shape in her body, and as a tangible thing, like a child still unborn, beat at confining walls. It lay heavy within her, begging to be released.

There was irony grimacing through all the evoked memories of Petroff's smile, irony which had touched everything she had thought or done since she had left Sylvus. She could forget nothing, try as she might.

It was as if Petroff had known this, before she went away, as if he had known she was going be-

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fore she knew herself. Probably, had Petroff known of the little Greek poet, his smile would transform even that into something suspicious and wrong but inevitable. How different were these two men! If Constantin had been in New York he would not have allowed her to leave Sylvus.

She moved restlessly on the bed, turning her head to the wall. Thinking now of Constantin she remembered the violent scene between herself and Allen, the undignified scene while the little poet was dying. And what she tried to deny through all the business of the funeral came hideously clear, almost led to her brain by Petroff's smile; that scene of jealousy, unquestionably part her fault, but which, in some dim manner, seemed to have tarnished Allen's strength, simply because in an unreasonable feminine way she knew herself to be innocent of grave indiscretion. Of course Allen had acted within his rights as a man who finds out a lie, and she despised herself for ever having lied. But the contrast of her and him together that afternoon and the poet alone hanging in his window, stained her imagination.

Petroff's smile had always been a curious guide. It had haunted her from the first, and seemed almost to have given her into Allen's arms by its calm assumption that she was not trying to escape them. Seeing it to-day it seemed to be suddenly

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contemptuous, and more cynical than ever. She would have wished to scream out to him. "I'm *glad* I went with Allen!" She was shocked, as she tried to say it to herself, to find that she was no longer glad.

Was this a revelation or the effect of great fatigue? Her eyes still closed, she tried to remember the funeral, to skip and blur over the fear summoned by Petroff's smile. She thought of the square, blue-black hearse, dragged through the gray streets, the sun upon it, the indifferent-faced, cheerless servitors of the corpse, the girl and the painter in their rusty black, herself and Allen in their motor cab, and how she had mechanically watched the marking machine of the taxi jerk up two sous at a time as they went. Constantin had made a mistake in taking his own life. He should have waited to see what would happen in the future. All of a sudden she realized that one of the reasons she was so sad now was because she felt in her own life that there was nothing more to happen and that she was not content to have it so.

What after all was the most beautiful thing to her? To Constantin it had meant death, to Sylvus it meant the soul. To her, so far, it had meant the emotions her nerves and body could give her. This was no immortal God to worship! The love she gave Allen and he her, should be the most beau-

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tiful thing in the world, and it was not. Then there was something missing. What could that thing be?

Allen was charming and as good as men can be who have his kind of temperament, the temperament which attracts so many women. He had not grown tired of her; she did not think he ever would. He was ready to marry her. Then why was the ache, the void, the restlessness still with her? Why could she not be satisfied?

She opened her eyes wide, suddenly dismayed at the direction of her reasoning.

Allen had tiptoed into the room and stood watching her. She wondered how long he had been there. The light was less outside, and she felt cold. She stared at him quietly, her head back on the pillows.

He came forward. "How beautiful you look with your hair against the white," he said.

"Do I?"

"Are you rested?"

"Yes."

He sat on the edge of the bed and took one of her hands in his. "My Nona, you've slept a long while."

"I haven't been asleep," she answered, and wondered why his hand stroking hers, left her so passive, hardly interfering with the lassitude of

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her body or the working of her mind. He looked quite old, she thought. His face showed voluntarily sensual.

"You 've had a hard day, little girl."

"Yes, I have."

"What can we do to amuse you to-night?"

"I would like to hear some music," she said suddenly.

"We 'll go to Weber's and hear the Tziganes."

"I don't mean that kind. I mean *real* music — good music."

Before the scarcely contained surprise in his face, her sudden fancy strengthened. It seemed to her that during her entire stay in Paris she had been hungering for music, the kind she used to have. It had been her own fault that they had not gone to concerts. It was her right, therefore, to change her mind. She was indeed in a strange mood and not to be gainsaid in this unexpected whim.

"I thought you did n't want to go to concerts any more," he reminded her.

"I do to-night." She sat up in bed and smoothed her hair.

"I'm sure I don't know where to take you. Had n't we better go to a good theater or to the opera?"

"No, I want orchestra — and I know where I want to go."

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"Where?" He stopped stroking her hand, and rose from the bed.

"Constantin told me that there *were* concerts every night — the Touche concerts I think he said — just a small orchestra, and they play the kind of things I want to hear to-night. Shan't we go?"

"I never heard of them," he said dubiously.

"That does n't prove anything. You don't care for music the way I do."

"This is very sudden, Nona, this longing for music again."

"I know it, but I think I've been *needing* music like that for a long time, and did n't realize it until to-day."

"What made you realize it to-day?"

"Petroff," she answered slowly.

She had her way after that. Allen did not remonstrate or question further, but suffered her to hurry him through his dinner and to the Touche concert which they found took place every evening, as Constantin had told her, in a small hall on one of the boulevards.

From the moment when Nona had voiced the desire so unexpectedly shaped in her mind and actually set out about going to this concert, she showed a scarcely contained agitation and nervousness of mood which refused to be quieted until she and Allen took their seats in the concert hall. Then all

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at once she became composed and calm. It was as if the familiar atmosphere of a room in which music held supreme importance, soothed and lulled the unquiet restlessness of her mood. Around her were music lovers, sitting back already with attentive faces. Smoking was allowed and drinks such as coffee and liqueurs were served. Soon the musicians filed in and took their places on a raised dais, on the threshold between two quite large sized rooms. It was a small orchestra but gave the impression of being a sympathetic one, with earnest artists and an altogether convincing simplicity and sincerity in their manner of bending over their instruments.

The air grew thicker, golden colored and smoked, a haze from cigarettes swam and hung in clouds through which shone the lights of the room. Nona leaned back in her chair, her body relaxed, her eyes closed. Beside her Allen stayed correct and obviously patient. He had noticed that Beethoven had much to do with the program.

The little group of men played well. Their music made Nona happy. She forgot that Allen was next her, that people were around her; she listened to the voice of the violins and cellos as to the voice of old friends, bringing something lost back to her. Sylvus's face, frail and beautiful, shone out from the notes. A warmth and ache of pain enveloped

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her listening. She opened her eyes wide. Allen beside her was fingering his program.

“Have you had enough of this, Nona?” he whispered.

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT evening proved significant. It reopened the old world of concerts to Nona. Now all the love and need of music so long abandoned, came back to her, transformed into a love and need more mature than any she had yet known. She haunted concert rooms, soon becoming a familiar figure at all events of musical importance in Paris. At first Allen accompanied her, inattentive and bored, but after a time she came to be more frequently alone, always in the same pose of concentrated stillness, her eyes closed, her elbow propped by a knee, her hand supporting the droop of her head.

Allen, however, was not the man to humor this phase of hers for long. "My dear child," he complained one day, "I can't understand this mania you've developed for music. When we first came to Paris you never wanted to hear any."

"It quiets me now."

"Why do you need to be quieted?"

"I'm nervous these days."

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"Women are always nervous, it seems to me. You should n't give way to such things."

At the time of this serious remonstrance on his part, they were in their sitting-room, Nona curled on the divan, Allen lounging beside her. It was raining. Drops tapped on the window-pane, broke and rolled away like tears. The sky was plastered drab and discolored over the wet roofs; rain fell steadily, horizontally, with elastic rebounds as it reached the stone pavement of the courtyard.

Nona was not inclined to argue the subject that afternoon. She stayed obstinately still, looking out of the window.

"Nona."

"Yes?"

"What's the matter with you? You're acting queerly lately."

She avoided his eyes. "I'm trying to find myself."

"You found yourself the day you came to me, did n't you?"

She leaned back among the cushions and turned her head to the wall. "Allen, what's going to become of us?"

"Become of us?" he looked bewildered. "Why, we'll marry some day."

"How? I'm not divorced."

"But you will be."

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"I don't see when." She slid off the divan, walked slowly across to the window and leaned her forehead against the cool pane of glass.

"Is *that* what's worrying you? Why, my dear, if Sylvus does n't start divorcing you before the summer's up, you must go back to America and divorce him."

"I could n't divorce Sylvus," her voice rang unexpectedly passionate. "He's never done anything to warrant it. It's all been *me*."

"But, my dear —"

"Oh, it is n't that," she turned impatiently and went over to where he sat on the divan. With a sudden, flexible bend at the waist, she knelt and hid her face against his knee. "I don't know — I don't know any more," she murmured.

"Nona," he said sharply and leaning forward tried to drag her into his arms.

She lifted a pitiful face. "Be patient a while with me. Don't question me. Let me have my music. It's helping me to find out — things."

"What things?"

"There you see — you question anyway. Allen, Allen," she spoke wistfully. "You must be patient and wise. It will all turn out right."

"You'll have to explain this strange way of talking, Nona. Are you hiding anything from me?"

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She shook her head slowly.

He frowned, pulling at his mustache and staring at her. "I hate mysteries, Nona."

"All life is that," she answered and he could coax no further explanation or confession from her.

For a few evenings after this talk she consented to forego her concerts, and he began to attribute her mood to a passing feminine whim, and congratulated himself on having cured her of such an exaggerated hunger for music. But as they were sitting at dinner one evening not long after, she announced that she wished to go to the Touche concert.

"They have a fine program, Allen. I do so want to hear it."

"Oh, let's go to the theater, Nona."

"I don't want to go to the theater. Please let me hear this concert. You need n't come." She pleaded like a child.

Allen did not look pleased; his voice as he answered her was dangerously on the edge of temper. "You think I'll let you go alone?"

"Then come with me."

"No, dear girl, I could n't sit through one of those things to-night."

"You can perfectly well let me go alone."

"Nona, you're a spoiled child and you're acting

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outrageously. Do you think I enjoy spending my evenings alone? I've humored you enough. Now you come to the play with me."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I don't want to. Please be nice about it, Allen. I'll tell you what we can do and both be happy. The Scala, that vaudeville theater where they have such good 'Révue' is right next door to the Touche. You can leave me at the Touche, go and enjoy yourself and then come back for me."

"I don't like it," he said. "You can't be alone at night in Paris."

"But I won't be — really — only at the Touche, and you know lots of women go there alone."

She begged so hard and so persistently that at last with bad grace he yielded. "Well, for this time then, but I warn you I don't like it, and I won't give in again. I'm only doing it now because you've been more reasonable the last few evenings and not asked to go."

At once she became docile, but he hardly spoke to her the rest of dinner, and the drive to the concert room was accomplished in silence.

As soon as he left her she was conscious of a distinct feeling of triumph and relief. It was early yet. The musicians were tuning their instruments, and looking out into the small audience, occasionally smiling as they recognized friends. Small knots of

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people filed in and chose their places; the waiter began his rounds taking orders. A thin young man in front of Nona with parchment-like skin and weary eyes opened a score of Beethoven symphonies and studied eagerly. A fat, red-faced man next him, sank comfortably into an after-dinner digestive pose and unfolded a socialist newspaper; a few middle-aged women with scant hair untidily done and bad teeth, whispered among themselves. Nona paid no attention to any one. Her program lying unheeded in her lap, she sat with hands folded, her head bowed.

Just as the concert began, she was conscious of some one sliding into the vacant seat next her, but she did not look around.

"Will you permit me? What a charming surprise to find you here!"

At the sound of the voice she turned with a quick start.

Petroff was smiling at her.

"Oh — you!" she said faintly.

"Me — in person," he whispered.

The musicians were launched broadly into "Coriolan," one of Beethoven's most beautiful overtures. It was impossible to speak further for the moment. She sat very still, seeming to listen, but hearing nothing. Petroff so close to her seemed

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like fatality itself, an impassive figure waiting until she should turn to it.

When the overture was over it was he who spoke first. "You are alone?"

"Yes, are you?"

He gave the old familiar shrug and smile. "Alway I am alone. But you, a charming woman, why are you alone?"

"I wished it," she answered curtly.

Petroff stared, his smooth, dark eyes with their unbetraying, glassy surface reflected her as in a mirror. "Ah, *bon* — so soon?" His manner had in it a something of facile impertinence which had never before been so accentuated. He leaned nearer. "When I saw you — it was some days ago; you will forgive me if I did not bow, but you passed so quickly and —"

"And you were not alone then," she concluded coldly.

Again the shrug, his hands delicately traced a deprecating gesture. "So it is in this stupid world. One may love if one is not honest enough to let it be known. But once known — one loses — friends."

"How is it you're here?" she asked abruptly.

"Monsieur Touche is a good friend of mine. Would you not like to meet him? You have al-

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ways liked music. You have a soul for music — and love.” He watched her, leaning as he spoke, so closely that he could whisper in her ear.

Not a muscle in his face stirred, his lips were unsmiling, his eyes enigmatic.

“I’m glad you came to-night,” she said suddenly.

“Madame!” Now the smile, tiny and insinuating, played across his mouth.

“I have something to ask you,” she went on.

The music was playing again, Beethoven’s third symphony. The little knot of men bent over their instruments, an earnest, sober group, their faces showing dark through the haze of smoke which floated in the room. The thin youth looked up from his open score and turned reproachful eyes to Nona. Some one behind her hissed faintly, as a warning to her to keep quiet. She put a finger to her lips. “Later,” she whispered.

The music and Petroff beside her, the heavy air, the waiter tiptoeing on his rounds, all seemed fused into a sensation felt before. The past weeks might have been leading to this one evening, so grave and calm did she feel sitting beside Petroff, the key to the question her soul wished to ask.

In the short pause between the first and second movement of the symphony she touched his arm. “Come outside, we can’t talk here,” she murmured.

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Petroff showed no surprise, but rose and followed her. Several people turned displeased faces at their going.

She pushed open the door cautiously, and tiptoed into the hall. There was a big staircase leading down to the main entrance on the street. She stood at the head of this staircase, leaning her elbows on the banisters, her back to the concert room. Petroff waited for her to speak.

"Tell me about Sylvus," she said simply.

"Ah, so!"

"Did he mind my going very much?"

Petroff's eyes searched hers mercilessly. "You wish me to tell you of his unhappiness? Ah, *les femmes!* They are indeed cruel."

"He *was* unhappy, then? I—I thought he would n't miss me so much."

"Is that why you went away then, Madame?" His voice played with her.

She shook her head hopelessly. "I did n't want him to suffer."

Petroff waved his hand. "What would you? Women will always make the drama of such things as love. You had only to love and stay home."

He leaned near her, his sleeve brushed her arm.

"I'm not like *that*. You could never understand."

"Why do you then ask me?"

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"Because you are the only one I know who can tell me. Where is he — what is he doing?"

"Why should I tell you, Madame?"

"I must know," she whispered passionately. "I've wondered and wondered."

"Do you hope that he is as happy as you are, Madame?"

She shivered. "Don't speak of me."

"But you have love," he murmured softly.

"I know I have one kind of love. But he — he did n't need me. He always cared for his music more than for me."

"His music was faithful."

"You're cruel, Petroff."

"I humbly beg of you pardon, Madame. Shall I please you then when I tell you that he plays as he has never played before, as a man who has lived through sad hours."

"Since — since I left?"

He nodded, his hand smoothing his chin, his eyes always upon her as if they did not wish to miss a tremor of the deepening distress in her expression.

"I — I'm glad of that," she said faintly. "And where is he now?"

Petroff waited a moment before answering, then he made his stage play. "He is coming here."

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“Here?”

“You are pale, Madame. It is that you are tired? Or that I should not have told you so much? But yes, he is coming here. We give a concert in Paris on the eighth of June. It is a little late, perhaps, for concerts, but it had to be so arranged. Have you not seen the *affiches*? They were put up yesterday.”

“He plays here the eighth of June?”

“*Parfaitement*, Madame. Does it then give you such emotion?”

“He will play.” She repeated it as if she were trying to impress the fact on her memory.

“Why do you care?” asked Petroff gently.

She tossed back her head in a pitiful attempt at indifference, but she felt a mist of faintness stealing like fog behind the bravado of her eyes, and in spite of herself she swayed a little. Petroff seized her arm.

“I have annoyed you. I beg of you pardon.”

“It’s nothing. I—I have a headache to-night. Hold my arm a moment. There, it’s passed! . . .” She stood alone now, straight and still.

“Permit me to tell you something,” whispered Petroff. “You love your husband.” He seemed to be enjoying himself intensely.

“How dare you say that?”

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He shrugged his shoulders. "It is so. *Al-lons*, Madame, you cannot hide the things of love from me."

"I don't love any one," she said wearily. "You've given me a shock, that's all, to know he's coming to Paris and will play."

The man who sold programs came out into the hall and eyed them curiously. In the silence which Petroff did not attempt to break they could hear the music muffled only by the door.

She answered desperately his unspoken glance towards it. "I can't go back in there. You go if you want."

"Shall I not then escort you home?" he inquired politely.

"I can't leave until the end. He's coming for me here."

"Then allow me to suggest that you take the chair over there and rest until it is over, the concert."

"I might as well," she agreed, and in fact she was leaning heavily against the banisters in a sudden access of weakness which deprived her of all power of resistance.

"He must n't see you," she murmured as Petroff led her to the chair in a corner of the hall.

He bowed gravely. "He shall not."

There was an intermission. People poured out

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of the concert room, forming groups of chatter near her. The restlessness of having sat quiet so long betrayed itself in their inconsequent gestures, their drifting from one place to another.

Petroff bent over her. "I shall say *bonsoir* to Monsieur Touche. You allow me? I shall come back."

He was gone and she sat alone. She sat apart from all the noise and movement around her. The news that Petroff had told her beat a monotonous repetition in her head. She felt like a thin-walled room with but one thought inside, a thought which, bursting its heart, climbed as a plant climbs, which must find its way out to the light. She sat feeling it grow; she sat rigid while the people trailed back to the concert room; while the hall emptied again; while Petroff stood beside her, murmuring apologies for having left her; while the evening spun away.

After a long time, he bent over her passive hand, kissed it, murmured his adieu in her ear, and went away. The concert was over. The same little people began to stream out again, surrounding her, suggesting that she must break the immobility of her pose. She rose slowly and joined the flow of them down the stairs. Allen met her at the street door.

"Well, how did you enjoy yourself?" he asked

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cheerfully. “It *is* a good show at the Scala. Why, Nona — you look as if you ’d seen a ghost!”

“I have!” and he could get her to say no more.

CHAPTER XXXII

PETROFF had not told Nona all the truth. Sylvus was already in Paris and had been there for several days. Not only Sylvus but also Laura Dunn and Richard Worden, and, of course, the faithful Antonin. They were stopping in a modest little hotel in the rue de Lille.

Whimsical chance in the big city had willed that Nona should not meet them. It was indeed chance, for Worden in his big thorough way was "doing Paris," which meant that early every morning he was abroad, a Baedeker emerging from his capacious pocket, his soft, felt hat brimming his eyebrows, his beard a flaming friend of the June sun. There were very few places or streets he did not explore during these methodical tramps, and he had often passed the rue du Cherche Midi.

Laura Dunn stayed most often quietly with Sylvus who was in a state of alternating tacit melancholy and febrile restlessness, not even interested in his concert, the arrangements for which he left entirely to Petroff. When he did go out, he always asked to be taken to the Seine where he

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would sit for hours, preferably on the Pont des Arts, the only bridge over which no carriages passed. Here with either Laura or Antonin beside him he would stay, lost in a pose of reticent thoughts and secret dreams.

Worden had little by little, under the exigencies of Petroff's constant presence at the hotel, resumed formal relations with him. "I can't bear the man," he confided to Laura one day, when Petroff had left after an hour's music with Sylvus.

"He's looked amused lately," said Laura slowly. "Petroff's dangerous when he looks amused. I wonder what it is."

The next day Petroff himself told her. She was waiting in the hall of the hotel for Sylvus with whom she expected to walk that morning, when Petroff strolled up to her. He was carefully dressed, almost foppishly, with a gardenia in his buttonhole, his hair sleek and shining, his eyes fathomless, as he bowed over her hand.

Laura could not entirely hide the dislike with which she yielded him her hand.

"Mademoiselle is, as always, cold with me," he remarked.

"Am I?" she turned and looked pointedly towards the stairs for signs of Sylvus.

He edged closer to her. "I went to the Touche

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concerts the other night," he said. "You should go, Mademoiselle. They are nice concerts."

"Are they?"

"I saw there some one whom you know."

"Really! Sylvus is late this morning. I think I ought to run up and see what delays him." She took a step forward ready to leave him.

"I saw Madame Leete there," he continued softly.

"Nona!" Laura's habitual serenity was disturbed at last. She turned quickly to Petroff, but suave and discreet, he stared away past her.

"Does she know Mr. Leete is in Paris?"

He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his small hands in gesture of ignorance. "Ah, Mademoiselle, you ask too much of me."

"Did you tell her?" Laura's voice was sharp and sudden.

"I, Mademoiselle?" His eyebrows raised in polite surprise. "It is not my affair."

"That is quite so," said Laura. She looked vexed and troubled.

"If Sylvus, nervous as he already is, should find out, he would never be able to play at his concert . . . here he comes. I need hardly beg of you, Monsieur Petroff, to say nothing of this to him. *Nothing!*"

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"Mademoiselle may trust to my discretion," murmured Petroff.

Sylvus came up to them, leaning wearily on Antonin's arm.

"Oh, Sylvus, are you ready?" said Laura brightly.

"Monsieur has not sleep in the night," croaked Antonin, shaking his head. Antonin looked older than ever, more bowed and wrinkled, with his mouth drawn down to lines of chronic pessimism.

"My dear friend, that will not be good for you," said Petroff.

"Don't you all bother about me so much." Sylvus smiled faintly and transferred his arm from Antonin's guidance to Laura's. Then they went out into the clear, morning sunshine.

All that day Laura was not her quiet, calm self. Fine wrinkles between her eyes showed what usually her composure hid, that she too was older. That evening she and Worden dined alone in the restaurant and she confided to him what had been on her mind since Petroff had told her of Nona's presence in Paris.

"Well, we thought she might be here," said Richard tugging at his beard. "There's nothing to be done about it that I can see. She'll keep out of the way, I suppose."

"I don't trust Petroff. He has a weird love of

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intrigue. He may have told her. Then there are the advertisements of the concert. Yes, she'll know he's here."

"What difference does it make? She's done all the harm she can now. The least she can do is to keep out of his way."

Laura stared thoughtfully into space. "Poor Nona. If I have ever read her aright, it will mean something to her in spite of her Allen."

"Since when have you *pitied her*?" snorted Richard.

"Since I've known her."

"Well, let me tell you one thing. If she makes a scandal, or I meet that man Dietrich in this town, I'll half kill him."

"You are suggesting making a scandal yourself now," said Laura. "No, you would do nothing so useless, my friend. I'll tell you something you ought to know. Sylvus loves Nona yet."

"How can he?"

"He does. He loves her in a way he never could have loved before — and he'll love her to the day of his death."

"She does n't deserve it," growled Richard. "You'll be claiming next that she loves him."

"There are some women who, try as they may, can only have one man in their lives. If they are

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unfaithful to him and realize that they cannot forget, there is Calvary," said Laura.

"You're not going to tell me Nona is one of those women?"

"I don't know," she answered slowly.

They spoke no more of Nona, but Laura took old Antonin aside the next day and told him that Nona was in Paris and to watch Sylvus more carefully than ever, so that nothing should happen to hurt or disturb him.

Worden, in the meanwhile, was indefatigably busy. There was not a museum or an art gallery in Paris he did not visit, and those who loved him realized that he was weighing gravely all he saw. Tired as he might be after a day's exhaustive tramping, after dinner sitting in the private parlor which served the three of them, and in which, for Sylvus's work, had been placed a magnificent piano, the big man would brood, monosyllabic, his leonine head in his hands, his back bowed. Laura watching him, never questioning, felt that he was passing through an important phase of thought. What this phase was came out with a burst one evening after Sylvus had been playing.

"Say, Athene," the big man rose from his chair and smote the table with his huge fist, "I guess I understand a bit why our young ones want to come over here to study."

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"Why, that's an admission," Laura remarked quietly.

"Well, I've been looking around and seen a good deal. They *do* have things we can't give them at home — things it's needed generations of history to make." He stood fine and strong in the courage of an admission it had cost him something to make.

"Good old Richard," said Laura going over and patting him.

Sylvus seemed not to be listening. He sat by an open window, holding his violin.

"I've got to be square, though I still do claim that the red blood of our young ones, the daring to be true to their young ideas, must germinate in their own country. They've got to know how to digest these things in the old world. And it won't hurt them to come over here — but after they've been educated at home instead of before."

"I'm glad to hear you talk this way," said Laura; "I knew you would."

"Paris must be beautiful," murmured Sylvus suddenly from out his reverie.

"Everything is beautiful in June," rejoined Laura.

Paris was beautiful that June, warm and brilliant with silver lights and dappled, golden shadows on the Seine, with military music playing in the Gardens, the sparkle of gaily-robed little women

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brightening the terraces of the cafés, and glistening shop windows.

Sylvus felt the wonder of it all, but felt it as one who is wistful and lonely, who finds no place in the singing, happy world. He was wasting away, lending ear to the devoted anxiety of his friends without really hearing their voices, speaking without conviction, silent as a dumb thing hiding pain, except when he played. Then his pain was no longer silent. It was music of fire and torment.

The day of his concert he asked to go out alone with Antonin. His tall, emaciated figure, stooping painfully, made slow way along the quais to his favorite bench on the Pont des Arts. Antonin hobbled beside him, offering a still valiant arm in spite of the now permanent curve to his back, and the age which showed so relentlessly in the seams and creases of his face, the ridges of wrinkles. The patient look in his eyes was that of a faithful dog who has long been owned by the same master.

The sky this afternoon was the color of grass seen at a distance. When at last they reached the bench Sylvus sat facing the Cité and Notre Dame, while Antonin stood beside his master as if on guard. The hour sifted away, the river sang its message, far-off Paris hummed and called to those who understood its voice.

Suddenly Sylvus, raising his head, put his hand

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out in the direction in which he felt Antonin to be.

“Antonin, Antonin, where do you suppose she is?” It was a cry wrenched from him after long moments of suppression.

The old servant’s chin sank as a burden on his chest. “God knows!” he mumbled.

“I think of her night and day,” began Sylvus earnestly. “Suppose she needs me — she is so young.”

“The good God forgive her,” said Antonin in a voice which trembled. “I cannot pardon — she has made shame of the house.”

“How hard you all are — you and all the rest. I want her back.” He pressed a thin hand to his forehead. “I’m really blind without her, Antonin. My soul is blind. She was my light and hope.”

“Monsieur, you must not think of her. It grows late! We should go from here.”

“Not yet,” pleaded Sylvus.

Antonin put a wavering hand on his master’s shoulder. “Do not think of her, Monsieur. I do try not to think. I knew her since a child and it was as if she were my own, but I am finish with her. Never may I be proud of her again, for she have broken my old heart. No, do not think of her, Monsieur.”

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He stood so, peering shortsightedly down the bridge and Sylvus sat silent as before.

It was the homing hour. People were scurrying by, brows heavy with their own affairs. Paris surged and swayed, tossing upon this bridge stray samples of all manner of humanity,—lovers, little shop-girls with young, curious eyes, workmen in velveteens and broad trousers, poets with flying ties, beggars and children,—indiscriminately shuffled singly or in slow-pacing couples.

The sound of the passing of all these strangers was lost upon Sylvus, who sat dejectedly with no further word of what was in his heart, his hands limp at his sides, his soft felt hat drawn over his blind eyes. Antonin waited a while watching the to-and-fro of homegoers, then he tugged gently at Sylvus's arm.

"It grows late, dear master," he reminded.

Sylvus made a faint move to rise.

Suddenly the old servant pressed down upon his arm, and in a voice which shook beyond his control whispered, "I beg of you, Monsieur, to stay another instant—I have the pains of rheumatism in my side—just an instant, Monsieur."

"Poor old Antonin, certainly," said Sylvus and sank back on the bench.

Then Antonin hobbled quickly in front of his

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master and stood, his twisted back attempting to regain its old military erectness.

Nona was coming down the bridge on her way home.

She walked slowly looking out with wistful eyes to the Seine, and the soft world of gray roof-tops clustered at the foot of Notre Dame's flying silhouette. Within a stone's throw of Sylvus and Antonin, she saw them and stopped short, strained, carven in sudden shock, as if in an abrupt cessation of all movement around her, she had been caught and imprisoned in marble. She stood so for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, arrested, immobile; then her hands fluttered forward as young birds striving to fly, her head inclined itself in readiness for yielding knees; she suggested the impulse of a run and a crumbled heap at Sylvus's feet.

All at once it was as if Antonin's age and infirmity left him. His head reared high, his shoulders squared; like a wall he blocked the way to Sylvus, and his old eyes were young in their wrath. He put a hand upon his master's shoulder; with the other waved her away. No word was spoken and yet she was near enough to speak.

Sylvus stirred uneasily, as if dragged against his will from an abyss of painful dreams.

But Antonin, stern in judgment, pointed down the

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bridge in the direction which led away, and Nona, her head bowed, turning in obedience, fled. At her going, grown shriveled and very old again in a second, Antonin tottered. "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* My little one!" he moaned.

"What is it? What has happened?" Sylvus aroused himself sensitively. "I feel so strange as if something had happened, as if — Antonin, what did you say just then?"

"Nothing, Monsieur. Only that it is late."

"Is your rheumatism better?"

"It has passed, Monsieur."

Sylvus rose from the bench and stood facing the way Nona had gone. "I thought — I felt something — let's go back to the hotel. They'll be wondering where I am — and the concert is to-night."

Antonin, bent and feeble, offered his arm, and they went slowly across the bridge to the left bank of the river.

CHAPTER XXXIII

NONA fled. She ran without looking behind her. It was as if Sylvus had spoken through Antonin's silent judgment; spoken and condemned. What she had longed most to have happen and had also feared since she heard that Sylvus was in Paris, had happened; a half-breathed question was answered; and she at last face to face with the truth reflecting her stare, showing her a stranger often seen in dreams. She was the stranger, Sylvus the truth.

When she could run no further, gasping for air, the beats of her heart shaking her whole body to a shiver, the tips of her fingers cold and her feet numb, she slacked her pace to a groping walk which took her up streets that seemed endless hills. At first she could not see where she was going, then little by little her eyes found their focus. People and things, blurs in her wild flight, took shape again, became realities in a world which went pounding inconsiderately on around her, forcing her to move with its machinery.

She grew very careful how she walked and

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where, taking precise steps, waiting on the edge of curbs, until not a menacing carriage was in sight, for she was not sure she could balance herself, or thread her way safely, if there were need to dodge horses' hoofs and motor wheels; but after a while, she recovered her equilibrium, and soon she was able to think.

She had seen Sylvus, or that part of him which Antonin's condemning body had not hidden. She had seen Sylvus and he had not known she was there. Her soul quivered like a shamed, wounded thing, and called, as a hungry child calls for tenderness from this man she had left.

She must see him again — she must see him again.

Repeating this one coherent longing, she almost stumbled against a big column upon which were advertised the plays of the week, and there as if in direct answer, his name leapt out at her from one of the pasted bills on its side.

He was to play to-night.

Then to-day was the eighth of June. Yes, that was the day Petroff had told her. He was to play to-night? She read and reread the announcement. At a quarter of nine in the Salle Gaveau, he would play. Only two weeks ago she had heard Ysäye play there. Now Sylvus, her husband, would play.

She must be there; she must hear him play once

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more; perhaps she would never hear him again. That was all she knew, all she could untangle from the daze of the moment.

Grown cunning with the force of this obsession, she thought over it, walking now deliberately in the direction of the apartment. How could she manage to hear him play? Perhaps it would be better not to go home until afterwards; perhaps it would be wiser to steal off to the concert. But a sudden disgust of lies and dissembling and the small, stupid paraphernalia of a woman who does not dare be true to herself came sweeping to her mind in strong, sane reaction. The staleness of being afraid of Allen or any one filled her with distaste. She flung back her head in a regenerating gesture of challenge to herself, and proudly, quietly, turned the corner of the rue du Cherche Midi.

Allen was lying on the divan, a pile of books beside him. They were musty additions to his collection and smelt of dust.

As she opened the door of the sitting-room and came towards him, he raised his head and smiled. "Late again, kitten. Where have you been?"

"Allen. Sylvus is in Paris."

The books slid to the floor. He sat up. "I know."

"You know?"

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“ Yes.”

“ How? ”

“ I saw him.”

“ Why did n’t you tell me? ” She advanced upon him steadily.

“ What was the use? May I ask how you know? ”

“ I saw him, too.” A silence fell between them, then Allen leaned over and picked up the books. “ It does n’t seem to have affected you much.”

“ What makes you think that? ”

“ You ’re so quiet about it.”

“ Am I? ” She went over to the window and affecting to look out of it, gained final decision. Then she turned. “ He ’s giving a concert — to-night,” she said. “ I ’m going to it.”

“ What! ” He bounded from the divan, galvanized into sudden action, and came over to where she stood waiting for him, unafraid of his eyes.

“ I ’m going to it! ”

“ Are you mad? ”

“ No! ”

“ Will you kindly explain? ” His voice had dried sharply to authority.

“ Don’t let ’s get angry over it.” It was as if she wished to plead for calm in the talk she knew had to come.

“ I ’m not *angry*. But when you come home and

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suddenly announce that you've seen your — husband — and are going to a concert he's giving — my surprise is permissible, I suppose. Perhaps you'll tell me next he invited you."

"I did n't speak to him."

"You showed remarkable consideration to me in that at least."

"Allen, listen to me! I know it sounds mad — but I must hear him play again. It's unusual, I grant you, crazy, mortifying to you — anything — but the fact remains. I might have gone without telling you."

"It would not have been the first time you would have deceived me."

"Oh," she cried, stung to quick resentment. "Is this what I get for being honest?"

"You force me to remind you of certain things." He leaned against the table and played with a paper cutter, tapping its flat blade on his open palm.

"Well, you'll never have to remind me of them again. I'm never going to tell lies again."

"What brought you to this amazing decision?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I think seeing Sylvus — and being ashamed of myself."

"Please explain," he demanded peremptorily.

"I'll explain after I hear him play."

"You're not going to hear him play."

"I warn you I am."

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He came forward a step and his hand like an iron vice descended on her shoulder. "Not if I don't want you to."

"You're making a great mistake, Allen. You'd better not threaten."

"We've got to understand one another. What does this mean?" he began slowly, releasing her shoulder. "It's quite a time now since you've been yourself—the Nona I loved from the first. Now why?—What has happened?"

She walked to the divan and settled herself upon it. "It's been something I can't explain myself."

"You acknowledge there *is* something?"

She nodded.

He followed her, bending his head close to hers.

"Don't you love me any more, Nona?"

She did not answer.

"Don't you love me any more, Nona?"

Then she looked at him with wide and rather vacant eyes. "If I should say, 'No'—?"

"I would n't believe you." He sank down beside her on the divan. "I would n't believe you. No woman would do what you've done and not love."

"I wonder —"

"You've *got* to love me!" he said fiercely. "I've been your master. I've given you all I

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have, the rest of my life, my honor. What more could you want?"

"That's it — I do want more. I want —" she lingered over the words, "I want the more because I've made a circle of things, don't you see? Sylvus gave me something you could not give, a love pure beyond the animal — you give me what he did n't — the material, the passion of sight and touch. I have tried and known these two ways of caring, *now* I want the perfect, the union of soul and body — I am asking too much, I know."

"You're talking like a melodrama," his voice was cutting. "We've both given you our best, and you'll go on I suppose sampling others, trying to find this perfect love you imagine exists."

She sprang to her feet flaming. "Don't you dare say such things!"

He shrugged his shoulders moodily. "The truth is you don't know yourself what you want. Women like you, if they're not mastered, go on and experiment and make mistakes until they get the habit. But I won't let you, do you hear me? And as for this absurd idea of yours that I should permit you to go to Sylvus's concert, why, I forbid it without discussion."

"I'll disobey you."

They stared at one another divided all of a sudden as by an abyss. Then he went over to the

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table where the front-door key lay and put it in his pocket.

"What did you do that for?" she asked.

"I'm going out," he said slowly, and taking his watch from his pocket, he looked at the time. "I'm going out for one hour. You will stay here alone and think of all the foolish things you've said. I treat you like the child you are. So that you'll do nothing ridiculous I'll *lock* you in. You will make no scandal in the house, I'm sure. When I come back we'll talk more of this —"

"You would n't dare."

He started for answer to the door, but she flew at him and clinging to his arm, tried to pull the key from his pocket. "Give it to me!" she panted.

"Oh, you will, will you?" Suddenly he wheeled about, caught her in his arms and carried her back to the divan, and with his hands pinned her by the shoulders there among the cushions. "Now, what can you do?" He was a little out of breath, for she had fought hard, and still although she could not move from his grip, her eyes gleamed up at him untamed.

"You brute!"

"Do you love me?" he bent down until his lips nearly touched hers. "I'm not going to let you up until you tell me you love me. I've been patient long enough, my dear."

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"Let me go."

"Do you love me?"

"No!" she cried, "No, No, *No!*"

She could see the little muscles in his face quiver and stiffen, his eyes were half-closed. "Say that again."

She struggled violently. "I won't say it again. What's the use? I didn't want to say it. You *made* me."

He stared at her, and she stared back, letting him look deep behind the raised curtain in her eyes. Then very slowly he released his hold; very slowly he went over to a chair near the table and sank into it like a man grown old.

There fell between them an emptiness so dreary and hopeless that it seemed to spread into eternities of fatigue.

She lay and watched him, her face expressionless.

At last he dragged himself from the chair and went over to the door. "I'm going away," he said carefully. "But I've left the key on the table. You'll *be here* when I come back."

"Don't trust me."

"You won't disobey me. I must prove to myself that you won't — and to you. In an hour —"

"Don't go at all then."

"Yes, I'm going. Most men would n't, but I

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am. I want to leave you alone with that door open."

"I've been honest with you."

He stood in the door, tall, *svelte* and weary of face. "Yes, you've been as honest as you *can* be. But remember, you're a woman who never thinks the same for an hour, and you'd be sorry if you went to this concert."

"The will to go is stronger than I am."

"We'll see." He paused a moment and then went out.

She slid from the divan and ran to the window, flinging it open. Allen was crossing the courtyard. His long, graceful figure with its slightly lean shoulders and well-poised head, swung from her sight.

She closed the window and glanced about her curiously, at the divan with its crumpled cushions, at a book on the floor, which she picked up, at the key on the table.

Then she went into her bedroom, carefully washed her face and powdered it, put on her hat and a white lace veil, counted some gold in her pocketbook and started out. In the hall she hesitated a moment, came back and scribbled a note which she left on the table.

"Expect me when the concert is over."

She left the apartment softly, walking as one who

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walks towards something beautiful and clear. She walked out upon the streets and down to the river, where leaning against the balustrade of the Pont Royal she gazed towards Notre Dame whose silhouette, cut by the roofs of houses, looked like two temples poised in the air.

A great peace was hers. "The most wonderful thing in the world is to find one's soul, even if the finding of it is cruel," she murmured, watching the long shadows trail their slow skirts across the Seine and the lights that looked like hiltless daggers plunged into the water. The little boats wide and low, were like bright worms crawling under the bridges, the omnibuses and buzzing motors and lopsided fiacres trundled on their separate ways. Yellow lights in the late dusk twinkled like candles in a church.

For a long time she leaned on the bridge railing. The Seine, old and wise, calm that evening, curled off to a haze of promised land.

At last she drew herself erect, wrenched from her dreams, and walked slowly in the direction of the Salle Gaveau.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ON the occasion of Sylvus's first concert in Paris, the Salle Gaveau showed some gaps in orchestra and gallery seats, but as a whole it was a good house into which Nona was ushered, just a few moments before Sylvus was to make his appearance. She had taken one of the only two covered boxes, directly over the stage facing the grand piano.

Worden and Laura were in an open box on the same side of the house. She could not therefore see them, but she knew they must be there, and with a vivid return of vision remembered that at the beginning of the past winter they had been with her in the box for Sylvus's recital in New York. She wondered if they were remembering too.

Her mind was clear as a polished mirror ready to reflect, her eyes bright and still, her heart beat like a clock ticking faster towards an expected hour. She sat far back in the box, her lace veil hiding her face.

But when Sylvus came at last, led by Petroff, it

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seemed to her all of a sudden as if the great hunger of her soul going out to meet him, longing for the light and radiance of his spirit, was quenched sternly by encountering another hunger in his face, a face which belonged to a Sylvus she did not know. The mother instinct in her quivered and stirred.

He bowed without smiling. The lines around his mouth had deepened; there was a shadow on his brow, his eyes were closed.

Petroff took his place at the piano and they began to play the sonata of Grieg.

Now, Sylvus played on as if he would play forever, play through the passion, the whirls of revolt and pain, the emotions of men. His playing was impregnated with such loneliness as sent each note laden and solitary to seek its brother. He swayed slightly, frailer, more gaunt of figure than in the old days.

It was as if his violin grew larger and filled unending space—he himself lost outline and limit; he was a tangle of mist, of music, spreading, subsiding in waves.

Petroff played turning his head from time to time toward the audience. The gloss of his eyes was lost by distance. They looked opaquely black. He searched the orchestra seats and the galleries as he played, his fingers marvelously independent of

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his attention, manipulating the minor harmonies of Grieg's northern-hearted music. His glance slid around the boxes, until it rested on the one facing him, which held Nona. There it stayed persistently and he smiled at last.

The sonata came to its end. Rushing on like another movement, a burst of applause broke sharp as the beat of hailstones against a window-pane, the reverberant arc of a few voices shouting, "Bravo!" In their box, Richard, tall and ruddy-haired, stood up and boomed his approval, Laura clapped evenly.

Sylvus bowed, his mouth grave and unsmiling. He kept turning his head in a strange, restless way from side to side as if there were something for which he was hunting. But Petroff smiled a last time towards Nona, took the blind man's arm and led him out.

Nona sat huddled, her head down, her face drawn tense, her hands in her lap; she sat as if drowned by a great, lonely stillness outside of life, of love, of light; she sat humble and young on the threshold of knowledge.

Suddenly behind her the door of the box opened with a creak and slammed. Allen stood before her, harsh, commanding.

"I've hunted the house for you. Come home *at once*," he said and his voice was so hoarse it was unrecognizable.

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She looked up startled, "You, Allen!"

He sank into a chair beside her. "How *could* you?" he whispered fiercely. "How *could* you do this? Come away."

"I won't," she whispered back. "Not until it's over."

"Come this instant or —"

"Or what?"

"Nona, you're driving me mad!"

"What can I do?"

"Don't you see what you've done already?"

"I had to do it. I warned you I would,"

"Come back and I'll forgive you."

"No."

"I'll *make* you!" His hand hunted and found her wrists.

"If you do, I'll cry out."

He looked into her eyes and believed her.

"What position am I in here?"

"Go then. You should n't have followed me."

"And my rights? Where are they?"

"You had them."

"Don't you love me any more, Nona?"

She stared at him through her thick veil. The red of her hair showed a stain behind the mesh of the lace. "No," she said gently, "I don't think I ever did, Allen — not the right love."

"You don't know what you're saying. You

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don't know yourself. How can one change like that?"

"If you'd understood, you would have seen the change coming long ago. The day of Constantin's funeral I began to realize it."

"Come away, Nona. We can't talk here."

"No."

"You think *he'll* take you back, perhaps. You're waiting here hoping —!" his voice rasped despairing and ugly.

"No," she said quietly.

"It is n't fair."

"I know it is n't."

"My God! I won't have it."

"Hush! Here he comes." She drew away from him gently and a finger to her lips, leaned forward.

Petroff led Sylvus out upon the stage. Then casting a swift glance up to the box, he whispered in Sylvus's ear. "She's here!"

"Nona — Nona!"

"Hush! Play! Yes, she's here."

Sylvus, violin in hand, facing the audience, swayed like a drunken man. Petroff at the piano watched, ready to catch him should he fall. His smooth face remained passive as he wove harmonies, waiting and watching what Sylvus would do.

People in the audience whispered and rustled

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their programs, some craned their heads forward, others at the back of the house stood up.

Laura in her box made as if to rise, whispering to Richard, "What's the matter with him?"

Now Allen, dissembled in the shadows of the box, noticing Sylvus's agitation, spoke once more urgently, "For God's sake, come away."

But Nona, her eyes wide and dark, moved forward. As she did so, slowly Sylvus lifted his violin, slowly, as if it were very heavy for his arms. Still swaying, he tucked it under his chin and poised his bow. Then Petroff struck the opening chord of the César Frank Sonata. Nona moved further forward.

Behind her Allen sat stiffened, a black shadow.

Like a tree in the wind, Sylvus swayed, as the notes, weak and shivering leaves blown away, fell scattered and thin. Petroff played and smiled to himself, well content at the pretty drama of his making.

Nona crept further forward. Now she was in the front of the box, her elbow on its edge, her neck and head strained. She listened tensely and it was as if a current started, growing in volume, flowed forward from her, swirled around Sylvus, mounting in waves, pinioned his music, his violin, his arms, twisted him from the direction he was facing.

"Nona, come back in the box at least. Every

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one is looking at you. I beg of you for my sake, stop this scandalous exhibition of yourself," urged Allen.

She paid no attention to him. Her soul exultant, crystallized, flung out the current like a banner. Her hands clutched the edge of the box. She waited.

Sylvus's body turned as if on a pivot. Still playing he turned until he faced her.

There was a hush. People in the audience rose to their feet. Petroff stopped playing.

"Nona!—Nona!" cried Sylvus. The violin dropped from his nerveless grasp and lay on the ground. He stretched his arms out toward her. With a quick gesture Nona undid her veil as if to show him her face, resplendent and shining. Then she rose and stood poised for a second in the dark frame of the box. Just for a second, before she turned and walked quickly to where Allen blocked the door.

"You're mad," he said in a low, strangled voice.

"Let me pass. I must go to him. He wants me. Did n't you *see*?" The light in her face was terrible and relentless.

"So this is the end?"

"Forgive me, Allen, let me pass quickly, quickly."

"Yes, I'll let you pass. I would n't keep you now, if you begged me on your knees."

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“Poor Allen,” she said softly. “You’ll have to suffer, I’m afraid. Your pride will have to suffer and your love — because you *do* love me. I’ve found my way back to my real self through you. Isn’t it strange?”

“You’re mad!” he murmured again. It seemed to be all he could say.

“I *was* mad — and blind. Good-by.”

Without another word he flung open the door and she passed, leaving him dark and alone in the box. She went as if she were following a shaft of light, back to Sylvus, her husband, who forgave and needed her, forward to a love which was born the most beautiful thing in the world.

THE END

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Hale, Mrs. Marice Rutledge (Gibson)

The blind who see.

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